

1996

The Santa Cruz County Sentinel and its readers

Gary Christopher Giacomo
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation

Giacomo, Gary Christopher, "The Santa Cruz County Sentinel and its readers" (1996). *Master's Theses*. 1367.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.mn2p-nnjf>
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/1367

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

**THE *SANTA CRUZ COUNTY SENTINEL*
AND ITS READERS**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Gary Christopher Giacomo

December 1996

UMI Number: 1382571

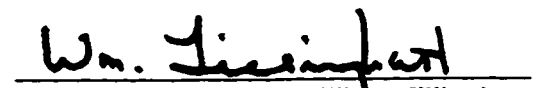
UMI Microform 1382571
Copyright 1997, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.

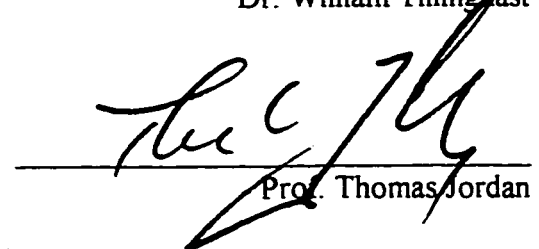
**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS


Dr. Diana Stover


Dr. William Tillinghast


Prof. Thomas Jordan

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY



Copyright 1996

Gary Christopher Giacomo

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

THE *SANTA CRUZ COUNTY SENTINEL* AND ITS READERS

by Gary Christopher Giacomo

This thesis is a qualitative study of the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* in Santa Cruz, CA and its readers. The study examined how well the *Sentinel* is serving its community, and how the paper's marketing orientation and competition are affecting the daily product.

The fieldwork, which was conducted during a six-month period in the spring and summer of 1995, included eight focus group meetings, interviews with newspaper employees, and person-on-the street interviews with newspaper purchasers. Data from self-administered surveys were used to augment the qualitative data of the focus group meetings and interviews.

The study found that as a source of local news, the *Sentinel* cannot be replaced by any other single media in the county. However, the newspaper suffers from a credibility problem with many segments of the population, and to succeed and prosper it must focus its attention on the basics of thorough and balanced reporting of local news.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere appreciation to professor Diana Stover of San Jose State University who offered invaluable advice during the planning and execution of this study. The author is also grateful to fellow San Jose State University Graduate Student Tara Murphy who assisted in the focus group meetings, and who offered much needed moral and intellectual support during the data collection phase.

Special thanks go to many employees of the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, especially Editor Tom Honig, who took time out of their busy schedules to assist the researcher in the completion of this study; and to the focus group participants who were so candid in sharing their comments and feelings about the *Sentinel*.

And finally, the biggest thanks of all to my wife, Sherry, and my son, Matthew, without whose enduring and unselfish support, this oftentimes overwhelming project, quite frankly, could never have been completed. Thanks you two, I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	7
The market-driven newspaper	7
Fading community ties	15
No competition?	20
Summary	21
Research question.....	23
3. RESEARCH METHOD	25
4. RESULTS	34
Overview of primary findings.....	34
Physical observations.....	35
A small but diverse county	36
Santa Cruz: Where the ‘60s came and stayed?.....	38
Community attachment: Hey, it’s just a zip code	39
Build a better newspaper and they will come.....	41
Taking care of business.....	42
Bright lights; little city: Too parochial	44
Credibility, bias, image.....	45
Shallow reporting	48
The <i>Sentinel</i> and its people	49
The management of the <i>Sentinel</i>	50
The Ottaway way: No lousy newspapers.....	53
Other publisher’s challenges.....	53

Use it, want it, bitch about it	54
Fighting the good fight.....	57
Chasing the advertisers: 218 media options	57
Other newsroom employees	59
What the <i>Sentinel</i> is doing right	60
The <i>Sentinel</i> is the local source	61
Great journalism	61
Syndicated writers: Getting what they don't get elsewhere.....	62
Price.....	62
More local news and better local news	62
Better access to the paper: Who do you call?	63
5. CONCLUSIONS	64
Overview of Findings.....	64
Limitations of the study	68
Contributions to the literature	69
Directions for Further Research	69
REFERENCES.....	71
APPENDIX 1 Letter from Tom Honig	78
APPENDIX 2 Solicitation letters to the community	80
APPENDIX 3 Reader questionnaire:	83
APPENDIX 4: Focus meeting script.....	87
APPENDIX 5: Question areas for interviews with <i>Sentinel</i> personnel	90

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As direct, daily-to-daily newspaper competition has declined in the United States, scholarly attention by those studying newspapers has focused almost totally on examining the deaths of individual newspapers and charting the grim statistics of declining competition and stagnant readership. Not surprisingly, this emphasis on the study of newspaper failure by scholars such as Bagdikian (1992) has accentuated the negative and resulted in a discouraging outlook for the future of newspaper readership in general and newspaper competition in particular.

And, although the newspaper industry remains profitable and, according to Foust (1993), has annual revenues of roughly \$40 billion, newspaper industry meetings and discussions in the trade press are studies in self doubt. Understandably, newspaper publishers worry that direct mail will steal their advertisers, that cable television and on-line services will steal their readers, and that their own mistakes in the imperfect world of newsgathering will rob them of credibility. Indeed, the world, their local communities and the competing media options have changed so fast that even the marketing consultants who increasingly have infiltrated the newsrooms of the nation's newspapers have been hard-pressed to keep up.

Editor and Publisher Yearbook (1996) reported that daily newspaper circulation in the United States hovers near 63 million. However, this number has not grown substantially since the 1960s. Although the population and the pool of potential newspaper readers grows each year, evolving social and economic forces have been at work and newspaper circulation has stagnated. Furthermore, the numbers of daily newspapers continues to decline. Eight titles disappeared in 1995 bringing the total number of daily newspapers in the United States to 1,548. Indeed, the entire newspaper industry is in a state of change and not much of this change is positive.

Cose (1989) quoted Larry Jinks, then senior vice-president of the Knight-Ridder newspaper group, who observed: "I grew up in an era in which mostly white English-speaking males put out newspapers with a little bit of help from white English-speaking females" (p. 68).

Yet Cose (1989) observed that the cities in which Knight-Ridder publishes newspapers are becoming less white and less English-speaking and their work forces are becoming less male.

An example of this situation can be seen in Long Beach, CA where Knight-Ridder's *Press-Telegram*, located in a community with growing numbers of Asian and Hispanic immigrants, has added only 1,000 readers to its daily circulation since 1988 (Editor & Publisher Yearbook, 1988, 1996).

A possibly more complex, but also nearly textbook example can be found in Santa Cruz, CA at the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*. The *Sentinel's* ABC-audited weekday circulation has dropped from 29,054 in 1990 to 27,691 in 1996 (Editor & Publisher Yearbook, 1990, 1996) while the population of the newspaper's target circulation has grown 22% in that same period, from a population of 77,815 consisting of 32,401 households, to a population of 94,930 and 37,351 households. In addition, 1990 census data report a growing Hispanic population which is not being reached by the newspaper. Hispanics comprise nearly 18% of the county's population.

In a development typically of many newspaper properties in the last two decades, the *Sentinel* has gone from local family ownership to group ownership. Ottaway newspapers, a division of the Dow Jones Company, acquired the newspaper in 1982. However, the McPherson family, which had owned and operated the newspaper for 118 years, remained involved in the newspaper's management until the election of editorial page editor Bruce McPherson to the state Assembly in a special election in 1993.

In 1990, the *Sentinel* positioned itself as not only the newspaper of record for the city of Santa Cruz, but also as a newspaper of countywide significance, seeking to serve readers from the affluent 9,300-population bedroom community of Scotts Valley to the low-income barrio apartments of Watsonville with its 32,800 residents. To reflect the broader scope of coverage, the traditional old English logotype, *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, was replaced with a more modern typeface and the name, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*.

History

Today's *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* traces its roots to 1855 when it was first published as the weekly *Monterey Sentinel* in Monterey by John McElroy. A year later McElroy moved north to Santa Cruz and renamed the paper the *Pacific Sentinel*. In 1864 woodcutter Duncan McPherson, bought the *Pacific Sentinel*, renamed it the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, and thus began 118 years and four generations of McPherson family involvement with the newspaper.

According to Rowland (1944), the *Sentinel* became a morning daily in 1884. A competing daily, the *Santa Cruz Evening News*, began publication in 1907, and in 1941 the *Sentinel* bought the *News* and operated both papers independently. The *News* was published Monday through Saturday evenings, the *Sentinel* on Tuesday through Sunday mornings. Following World War II, the papers were merged into the *Sentinel-News* with publication Monday through Friday afternoons and a Sunday morning edition. The lack of a Saturday edition, typical of many small-town dailies, gave credence to the untrue rumor, which persists to some degree today, that the McPherson's were Seventh-Day Adventists. In its centennial year, the paper again became the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*.

Fred McPherson, Jr., grandson of Duncan, took over the publisher reins when his father died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1940. In a tradition typical of small town newspapers and their publishers at the time, the owners were members of a conservative Republican family and their political leanings were reflected in the news as well as the

editorial pages of the *Sentinel*. As King (1986) noted: "Fred Jr. was a Republican conservative, who, his sons recalled, grew more conservative by the year."

The politics of the publisher and the editorial slant of the newspaper during the McPherson's ownership, would come back to haunt the newspaper in later years when the community's politics and demographics changed and the McPhersons sold out to a newspaper group.

In 1971, representatives from the Ottaway Newspaper Group, a subsidiary of the Dow Jones Company that was in an acquisition mode, began talks with McPherson about purchasing the *Sentinel*. The initial meeting, however, was not fruitful, as King (1986) noted:

Neither Ottaway nor Cony (Edward R. Cony, the *Wall Street Journal* managing editor, who had relatives in Santa Cruz County) was favorably impressed with the news content of the 1971 *Sentinel*. "Pretty bad on local news," Cony wrote. "Very heavy on wire service material."

However, the Ottaway group continued to make contact with McPherson, who had two sons who were being groomed to take over the reins of the newspaper. From 1971 until the ultimate sale to Ottaway in 1982, representatives from Donrey, Scripps, New York Times Company, Washington Post Company, Gannett, and McClatchy newspaper organizations all expressed interest in purchasing the *Sentinel*. According to King (1986), McPherson had early on found the Ottaway group to his personal liking and, despite the common knowledge within the industry that of all its suitors, Gannett was the most interested in acquiring the newspaper, finally after nearly a dozen years of talks with McPherson, Ottaway got the nod.

With the Ottaway acquisition came the deep pockets of a newspaper chain. A new \$5 million offset press was installed in 1985, replacing a 1937 letterpress relic. Following national trends against afternoon dailies, the *Sentinel* became a morning newspaper in 1986. Robinson (1994) reported that Fred McPherson, Jr. also stipulated in the sale

contract that no *Sentinel* employees would lose their jobs as a result of the sale. McPherson's sons were given three-year employee contracts and McPherson wore the title of publisher emeritus, maintaining an office in the *Sentinel*. However, the elder McPherson's day-to-day influence on the newspaper steadily waned.

Although the *Sentinel* is the only daily published in the city of Santa Cruz, it is locked in a very competitive market struggle--dividing readers with several community-based weekly newspapers, a chain-owned daily in Watsonville, and regionally, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the powerful Knight-Ridder-owned *San Jose Mercury News*.

As always, newspapers will thrive or fail on the strength of their attachment to readers and the communities they serve. In general, American newspapers are suffering from declining readership, and a variety of socio-economic reasons can be cited to explain declining newspaper readership. Although the wants and likes of readers cannot be overlooked, the possibility remains that newspapers, like the iceman of the last century, are passé and may never recover must be seriously considered. The *Sentinel* and its readers provided a unique laboratory to study this evolving phenomenon.

Purpose Of Study

Undoubtedly this is a crucial time for newspapers in general and the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* in particular. The twofold purpose of this study, therefore, was to determine the strong and weak points of the *Sentinel*, as articulated by readers, and how vital the *Sentinel's* presence as a local newspaper is felt in the Santa Cruz community. Where changes were clearly needed, constructive criticism was recorded. Where the *Sentinel* excelled was also noted, and throughout the study, the opinions of the readers about their community daily were documented.

Since the *Sentinel* suffers from stagnated circulation growth, this study sought to investigate readers' perceptions as to what changes might lead to greater acceptance of

the *Sentinel* by the community. Further, this study investigated those items that readers really couldn't live without. And finally this study also sought to contribute additional information toward a better understanding of the relationship of community attachment to newspaper readership in today's media-rich and competitive society.

The following literature review provides an overview of the recent findings of scholars in three general subject areas that provided the general theoretical framework for this study: the role of community attachment in newspaper readership, the rise of the market-driven corporately-owned newspaper, and the economic impact of umbrella competition on newspaper readership.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Market-Driven Newspaper

The newspaper industry in the 1990s might be aptly compared to the United States' automobile industry of the 1970s that continued to blindly ride healthy profits into the sunset while turning out huge inefficient cars that just wouldn't succeed in times of high gasoline prices. And, like Detroit, newspaper publishers are examining their daily products and the markets they serve, searching for a magic formula that will help preserve both their solid profits and their traditional dominance in the media mix.

Certainly single solutions to readership decline are elusive, but the social, economic, and demographic reasons for it are well understood: a busy population with less time to read, competition from other media, an aging newspaper-reading population, a mobile population identifying less with its community, and a growing wave of immigrants who can't read English-language newspapers.

The newspaper industry has been alert and mobilized regarding its potential problems since the mid-1970s. As Schweitzer (1992) noted, marketing research, once the domain of the advertising and circulation departments, is very common in daily newspaper newsrooms. The analysis of this research leads to a marketing of journalism to readers, emphasizing the tailoring of the product to readers' perceived informational wants and needs.

Although the adoption of a marketing orientation in daily newspaper publishing is widespread, it has not enjoyed universal support from front-line journalists or newsroom management. As Lowe and deTarnowsky (1993) noted, the growing cottage industry of newspaper marketing researchers are encountering uncooperative journalists, who will dismiss even the most solid marketing research. These newsroom critics of marketing

contend that such blatant pandering to readers' wants is unprofessional and leads to a loss of newsroom autonomy over editorial decisions. One of the most vocal and well-publicized critics is Rich Oppel, a 19-year newspaper veteran who took over the editorship of the Austin, TX, *American-Statesman* in January, 1996. Shepard (1996) reported on a television commercial for the newspaper featuring Oppel:

"I'm not big on editors who edit a newspaper according to focus groups," says Oppel sitting behind his desk looking directly into the camera. "Or editors who try to guess what the readers want. If I go to see a brain surgeon, I'm not gonna be very impressed if he or she asks me how I want the surgery done."

Despite some old-school detractors like Oppel, most of the newsrooms of the nation's daily newspapers have come to the realization that to survive and, it is hoped, prosper, in today's media rich and changing mass communication marketplace, a marketing orientation is fundamental.

The first definitive large-scale study of newspaper readers' wants was commissioned in 1977 by a consortium that included the American Newspaper Publishers Association, American Society of Newspaper Editors, and the Newspaper Advertising Bureau. Dubbed the Newspaper Readership Project and undertaken by researcher Ruth Clark (1980), the culmination of the study resulted in a report titled "Changing Needs of Changing Readers."

Clark discovered a gap between what editors thought readers wanted and what readers actually wanted in their newspapers. Clark discovered that "people are much more demanding and selective about what they will spend time to read and less willing than before to let editors make their reading decisions for them" (p. 3).

Bogart (1991), in an examination of the entire project, noted that Clark's message, as many newspaper executives interpreted it, was that newspapers were to find out what readers wanted to read, and then present it to them in their news columns. Clark and other researchers such as Steve Star argued that such trend analysis could help stop the

public's abandonment of newspapers. Some newspaper editors took Clark's results to mean that by serving the dominant socio-economic and demographic groups in a circulation area success would follow, especially if the content was packaged attractively. At the same time, the advertising side of most newspapers was awakened to something that magazine publishers and radio and television marketers had long ago realized: mass audiences are really collections of diverse niche audiences. As a result, newspapers in the 1980s embraced special editorial sections designed to exploit niche advertisers and serve specific readers (e.g., real estate, automotive, gardening, travel) with heavy emphasis on features, catchy graphics, and color. These trends still exist today.

Editors had barely implemented Clark's first round of recommendations when she completed what has been termed "Ruth Clark II," published in 1984. As Underwood (1993) noted: "This time, Clark discarded her advice that readers wanted self-help and help-me-cope information and told the editors that readers now sought hard news, real news, facts about health, science, and technology" (pp. 10-11).

Clark's second report essentially concluded that newspapers had the best chance of attracting and keeping readers if they performed their traditional functions of explaining the world very well and did not try to find salvation through marketing gimmicks. Both Bogart (1985) and Urban (1986) concurred with the findings of Ruth Clark II.

However, Stamm and Underwood (1992), in a survey of newsroom management policies of 12 West Coast newspapers, noted a clearly marketing-oriented management style, which tended to treat readers as customers. Stamm and Underwood stated in their summary:

Newspapers are catering to the marketplace with their greater emphasis on customer-oriented journalism. But they appear to be doing this while trying to preserve the traditional journalistic values of editorial autonomy and community service so prized by news workers. This appears to be creating some

stress in the newsrooms, particularly in the newsrooms of chain newspapers where the push toward market-oriented journalism is strongest. (p. 317)

Clearly editors and other newspaper department managers have been compelled to bring down the traditional walls of separation from the business and news sides of a newspaper and cooperate toward a common goal of survival. Although some of this pressure to succeed may be derived from the altruistic nature of dedicated newspeople, economic pressures to perform well and profitably as articulated by newspaper management, certainly cannot be ignored.

When two or more departments in any organization depend on each other for achieving their respective goals, the potential for conflict or cooperation clearly exists. As Smith (1980) observed, the typical newspaper prospers in an environment of mutual dependence of its departments, coupled with an open and unapologetic history of deliberate decisiveness. For example, the editorial and advertising departments, because of their competing values and varying content, usually have an ideological barrier between them. As Laakaniemi (1987) noted, the bottom-line pressure from management at newspapers owned by publicly-traded media companies has led to an increasing move to bring down these traditional barriers in the financial interests of the newspaper. Such collusion between the business side and the news side of newsgathering operations, coupled with a market-driven business philosophy, is seen by some media critics and scholars as compromising the traditional watchdog role of the press in American society.

Beam (1996) concluded that, as uncertainty about how to best serve reader's needs increases, a newspaper will increase its marketing orientation. This increase in a marketing orientation is often viewed by editors and front-line journalists alike as compromising the editorial integrity and quality of the newspaper. As McManus (1994) observed, stresses are both internal and external to the market-driven newsgathering organization that feels compelled to compromise its professionalism to serve a market.

The readers who may be seeking quality news that lacks any marketing tie suffer in what is offered in their daily newspaper. This is not an entirely new or singular observation, and Bagdikian (1992) who complained of the peril of monopoly media conglomerates placing profits before quality in newspapering, has certainly not been alone. As Morton (1984) observed:

Year after year, the proportion of the population reading newspapers continues to drop, and year after year newspaper companies continue to make even more money. Has it occurred to anyone in the business to wonder whether there might be a connection between these two trends? (p. 52)

That some editorial newspaper employees might find a marketing orientation at the very least nonprofessional and at the worst, evil, is a curious position for most other departments in a newspaper to understand. Kotler (1991) offers a very straightforward definition of the marketing concept, which is a concept rooted in the very fabric of a capitalistic economy:

The marketing concept holds that the key to achieving organizational goals consists of determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors. (p.5)

To a circulation manager, then, delivering a newspaper to the doorstep on time or sooner than the competition is viewed as a positive marketing advantage. Similarly, editorial departments consciously try to scoop their media competitors, and yet as Dizard (1994) noted, the marketing concept, specifically the economic benefit to the newspaper organization, still seems to be lost on many journalists. In short, readers' stated preferences through research, coupled with ownership's directive to serve advertising niches, often conflict with journalists' professional values or traditional definitions of news. As Glandy (1993) observed, editors who cater to the preferences gained through market research are often criticized for pandering to the public and abandoning their core

journalistic values of independence and professionalism. It is then, a double-edged sword that faces newspaper editors today. As Hawley (1993) stated:

Giving the reader what it wants too often translates into giving the public what it is most inclined to consume. Readers' wants may conflict with their informational needs, assuming that it still holds that citizens have a civic duty to be adequately informed about current events and issues related to public policy. Thus, readers' stated preferences often conflict with journalistic' professional values or traditional definitions of news.

Yet, Bogart (1989) noted that most editors feel that editorial excellence is quantifiably rewarded by success in circulation. Hence it would seem that the traits, news judgments, and presentation that make a newspaper good from a professional standpoint, must also be considered to be the winning formula to make it popular and, as a result, commercially successful.

Coulson (1994) in a study of the impact of ownership on newspaper quality, noted that journalists' perceptions of appropriate local news coverage was more positive at independent as opposed to group-owned newspapers. His findings are consistent with an American Society of Newspaper Editors (1990) survey that tends to uphold the conventional belief that chain newspaper executives are more likely to emphasize profit as a top corporate goal than their counterparts at individually-owned papers. However, research by Olien, Tichenor, and Donohue (1988) suggests that individual editors of independent papers are more prone to profit concerns than are group editors. Fico and Lacy (1990) found few predictable differences in quality between group and independently-owned newspapers. Their research suggests that quality largely depends on an owner's publishing and business policy and the financial resources afforded to the paper, rather than the type of ownership.

However, as Soloski (1979) found, the financial expectations of a centralized, and oftentimes absentee financial administration can more readily force a group newspaper to

sacrifice news coverage and editorial diversity and commitment to community for operational profits. Matthews (1996) found that public ownership, for example, and the external pressures that come from continuous stockholder scrutiny, may create a different managerial environment and a different approach to achieving profit goals for newspaper publishers than private ownership, which is not subject to external financial analysis. Beam (1993) has suggested that any future research of newspaper chains should investigate how newspaper chains differ in the manner in which they control their newspapers, and the publishing and profit motives of each.

Ertman (1985), however, took a fresh look at the view-with-alarm positions on press monopoly and marketing-orientation that are embraced by most scholarly media critics:

A plausible case might be made that monopoly, not competition, could achieve the more desirable end—precisely because of the presumed insulation of a monopoly from market pressures (p. 150).

Morton (1984) concluded that some newspapers refused to skimp on strategic marketing investments, which included heavy use of advertising promotion and production of carefully packaged specialized sections, and said those are the newspapers that have kept a "strong grip on their readers" (p. 52).

Willis (1988) embraced a strong element in the International Newspaper Marketing Association's Total Newspaper Concept, which noted that a newspaper must be concerned about, and respond to, the needs of four external target groups. The INMA simplistically identified these groups as readers, nonreaders, advertisers, and non-advertisers.

Meyers (1986) more practically stated that the big marketing problem for newspapers is not to convert nonreaders, but rather to turn the infrequent readers into regular readers. To achieve this goal, he felt that newspapers will most likely have to capitalize upon their single strength, their dominance in local news coverage, while at the

same time conceding their regional monopoly on advertising to other media (i.e. television, radio, on-line services).

However, Blankenburg and Ozanich (1993) agreed with Meyers and Wearden (1984) that a profit orientation among news executives does not necessarily detract from the public service mission of journalism. Indeed, among editors of chain-owned newspapers of publicly-traded media companies such a market orientation in today's economy may be viewed as just part of performing one's job responsibly.

And even the best marketing may only be providing prolonged life support for slowly dying newspapers. Myers (1990) reported that many big city dailies have continued to lose circulation and advertising revenues as young adults have abandoned the daily newspaper in favor of free suburban or downtown weeklies and the electronic media. The response in many communities has been to imitate the short articles and catchy graphics of *USA Today* in an effort to lure the television generation to newspapers.

But Meyers (1985) and Bogart (1991) both warned newspaper executives that they imitate television at their peril. Although the underlying reasons for newspapers' readership stagnation are serious, research shows that there is not wholesale abandonment of newspapers in favor of television. Meyers (1985) noted that the bulk of newspaper readers are better-educated, more affluent and, in general, part of an upwardly mobile part of society, when compared to those who rely solely on television for information. He concluded that, if those same readers begin to find daily newspapers adopting television's superficial tactics for covering the news, they will search elsewhere for the in-depth information that is useful to them. Bogart (1993) observed that, although other media have evolved and prospered in an environment of many media choices, the newspaper industry, while quick to identify the problem of a dwindling pool of readership, has been slow to accept that it will take a substantial effort and a coherent strategy to once again make newspapers an essential part of the majority of people's daily lives.

The continuing study of what readers want, has had some startling effects, too, on the traditional mindset of newspaper editors. Research has shown that to better gain acceptance of their products in the community, newspapers must return to the basics of newsgathering and presentation. Simple questions such as 'what is news', 'what makes a story', and 'how does a feature story differentiate from a news story' need to be asked daily. Today's readers, used to channel surfing from their easy chairs or perusing magazine racks with hundreds of special-interest titles, do not want to hunt through the entire newspaper to find the few items that interest them. (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1995).

Urban (1985) observed that "publishing is the process of adding value to information by presenting it in a useful form" (p. 41). Her observation really forms the nucleus of maintaining competitive advantage in any publishing or mass media business venture, and, most importantly, forging essential links with communities and their pool of readers.

Fading Community Ties

There is a symbiotic link between newspapers and their local readership or, more precisely, community. In short, communities are necessary to newspapers, and conversely, newspapers are necessary to communities. But the structure and demographics of today's mobile and commuting society, populated by persons who do not identify strongly with their communities, does not bode well for local newspaper publishers.

Boorstin (1987) observed that one of the earliest definitions of the word "communicate" was, in 16th-century England, part of the definition of God. Originally, Boorstin wrote, "the word 'communicate' implied 'community', and it meant somehow to make common, to share" (p. 6). In today's information-rich society, however, we have reduced the concept of communication to the task of imparting information, to conveying

something, anything, to a market that has been gauged to be receptive. Boorstin (1974) observed:

We witness the cheapening of the word. Wherever we go and wherever we look, we see and hear words--mostly messages we would rather not receive. Once, the word was sacred, a synonym for the Word of God, that which has a special sanctity. But now words are everywhere and inescapable. (pp. 8 - 9)

Historically, mass communications scholars have noted the importance of community identity as a factor influencing modern media consumption. It is the function of social connection or, more precisely, community attachment that formed the basis for the observation of Park (1929) that gradients of newspaper circulation coincided with the functional boundaries of an urban community. In Park's view, newspapers served to extend the interpersonal channels of gossip in small towns and villages.

After nearly a quarter of a century of scholarly mass communication research, Wright (1986), building upon the earlier research of Lasswell (1948), concluded that there are four functions of mass communication which, simply stated, are: surveillance, correlation, transmission of the cultural heritage, and entertainment. Wright's four functions form the nucleus of today's market-driven newspapers in their effort to serve their communities. For example surveillance is a function of straight news sections, obituaries, and police blotters; correlation or making sense of what is happening in society is embodied in editorial and op-ed pages; transmission of the cultural heritage can be found in holiday-themed advertising sections, and features about religious and national holidays; and entertainment is served on the comics pages, in crossword puzzles, and in sports sections.

Janowitz (1952) noted the important function of the newspaper within a community and the newspaper's tie with the community. Janowitz concluded that: "content characteristics determine the limits within which the community press can create

an impact in opposition to the tendencies toward segmentalization and impersonality of human relations in the urban community" (p. 73).

Edelstein and Larson (1960), keying on Janowitz' observation of the importance of content, sought, through content analysis, to identify the degree to which the content of the newspaper serves to integrate the individual and group into a community structure. The researchers identified content categories that they felt contributed to certain assumed functions of the community press. The assumed functions identified by these two researchers tended to be the staple of successful community newspapers, that is, achievement of individuals and civic organization and club news. This type of content predominantly serves to link individual readers with a sense of homogeneous community identification.

Community attachment and identity, then, might be the natural products of living in a newspaper's circulation area, as Park had earlier theorized. However, Bogart and Orenstein (1965) concluded that residents in a suburban setting inevitably and naturally acquire a sense of identity with the people and institutions of nearby towns because of constant exposure to the news of a particular nearby town through reading its newspaper.

Although Park's view of community was largely defined by the clear black and white boundaries of a newspaper's circulation area, defining community has been a much more difficult task for many social scientists. However, Stamm (1985) chose to distill the various definitions in terms of three elements: place, process, and structure. By adopting this definition, Stamm worked to provide a scientific benchmark upon which researchers could apply scientifically valid cross comparisons. Stamm (1985) noted:

It is evident at any rate that the term "community tie" embraces a number of different concepts, and that some distinctions are called for. In fact, the number of different phenomena potentially subsumed under community tie seems staggering. Any one index could only scratch the surface of such a vast domain. But how is it

helpful to have charted out such a complex and detailed map? It would seem we can no longer see the forest for the trees. (p. 23)

Researchers, acknowledging the complexity of the study of community attachment, therefore, have tried to narrow the field into smaller, manageable, and quantifiable indexes. Stamm and Fortini-Campbell (1983) identified four ways that the individual could tie to community: spatially, cognitively, affectively, and communicatively. Although they showed that existing concepts usually pertained to one or more of these four links, it was often without reference to any particular community.

Kasurda and Janowitz (1974) produced an "index of community attachment" that included ties to place, process, and structure. In the same scholarly vein, Rarick (1973) in a study of newspaper subscribers and non-subscribers, and Stone (1977) in research centering on community commitment as a predictor of newspaper readership, built indices of community commitment based upon ties of individual, family, and household.

Stamm's (1985) comprehensive model of community ties research helped to bring the theory into clearer focus. His model was framed in a tri-part question: who? is tied to what? and by what kind of link?

Stamm's model provided a manageable framework to study community ties and made one significant addition, the element of gaps, to the emerging theory as it is applied to newspaper readership. Stamm identified spatial gaps, political gaps, social gaps, and information gaps, and the significant roles that newspapers can play in the bridging of such gaps in the community.

There is general scholarly agreement that exposure to the community-oriented content of newspapers is the mechanism by which newspapers contribute to community ties. But what cannot be ignored is what the individual reader brings to the newspaper reading situation. In conclusion, Stamm (1985) agreed with Edlestein and Larsen (1960), who observed: "It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the influence of

newspaper reading and then link it causally with local involvement and sense of community." (p. 497)

As Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, and Ryu (1996) observed, most recent research in community attachment and newspaper use is concerned with two types of ties to the community: affective community attachment and active community involvement. Community attachment is conceived as identification with the community combined with an affective tie. Attachment implies feeling a part of the community--seeing oneself as belonging. Attachment also means that this sense of belonging is positively evaluated, that one is happy and proud to belong. In this way the community and self are articulated together with the community being a contingency for one's own happiness.

As Rothenbuhler (1991) noted, community involvement is conceived as a combination of cognitive and active interaction between self and community. The interest, therefore, in the relation between media use and community affiliations derives from the logic that such use directs a person's attention away from matters of purely individual concern and toward the community. This type of research becomes more crucial in today's era of large regional monopoly newspapers where the sense of local community attachment with such a newspaper may be weak, and where the needs for surveillance, correlation, transmission, and entertainment of the reader may only be sporadically, if ever satisfied.

The rise of regionally powerful dailies has occurred despite weak ties to small communities within their sphere of circulation. Four general findings have resulted from research that continued Janowitz's work by Rarick (1973), Jeffres & Dobos (1984), and Stamm and Weiss (1986). These researchers concluded that people are more likely to read a community's newspapers if they are:

1. More settled in a community (e.g., have lived there long, own their home);

2. More active in the community (e.g., work, shop, send their children to school, attend church, attend other organizational meetings within the local area);
3. Feel more attached to, or more identity with the local area (e.g., root for the local high school sports team); and
4. These feelings of attachment produce interest in types of news that emphasize local events, gossip, and integration over conflict (unless it is conflict with an outside agency).

This theoretical framework suggests that a gossipy, somewhat provincial newspaper that avoids taking unpopular stands or undertaking in-depth reporting on local controversies, is the winning formula for a community newspaper. Indeed such a model can be used to describe many of America's weeklies and small daily newspapers in 1996.

No Competition?

Unquestionably there are fewer daily newspapers being published today than there were even 15 years ago, and just as surely the number of two-newspaper towns has diminished. In 1996, metropolitan areas as large as Houston, TX have only one general interest daily newspaper. In addition to Houston, cities that have seen the demise of competing daily newspapers in the last five years include, Dallas, TX, Richmond, VA, Miami, FL, Anchorage, AK, and Sacramento, CA.

Although Bagdikian (1977) bemoaned the decline of competing newspapers and the rise of corporate media giants, Rosse (1980) was cautiously optimistic regarding the future of newspaper competition. Although admitting that head-to-head daily newspaper competition had dramatically diminished since World War II, Rosse noted that alternative forms of print media (e.g., alternative free weeklies, community weeklies, and regional dailies) offered an environment for overlapping competition. Rosse termed this overlapping vertical market segmentation the umbrella theory of competition. Several researchers studied the rich competitive environment that faces many seemingly

"monopoly" newspapers, and discovered how neatly Rosse's umbrella model was followed. Tillinghast (1988) applied the model to the Los Angeles/Orange County newspaper market in Southern California. Lacy, Sohn, and Stephens (1989) studied metro and suburban newspapers in Detroit and Denver, and Devey (1989) studied umbrella competition in the Boston metro area.

Rosse's umbrella theory of competition states that competition exists between newspapers in different layers, rather than within layers. His model was based on media-rich metropolitan areas, and identified the four layers as: metropolitan daily newspapers, providing a great deal of regional and national coverage; satellite city papers, which tend to be more local in nature as compared with the metro layer; suburban dailies, which are almost entirely local in nature; and less-than-daily newspapers, specialized weeklies, and shoppers. Rosse concluded that newspapers in each layer compete with higher-layer newspapers for both readers and advertisers; therefore, competition among the layers intensified as one moved down the model.

Rosse noted that the circulation of the large, regional metropolitan daily, which forms an umbrella over the market, becomes less dense as one moves away from the center of the market. It is in these areas of diluted circulation influence that the newspapers under the umbrella of the large metropolitan daily can exploit local market niches with some success.

Summary

This literature review incorporates the results of a number of scholarly and industry studies that helped to lay the foundation for this qualitative thesis. These past studies substantiate the belief that newspapers must be mindful of the markets they serve, how their communities are structured, and how competitive forces are affecting a shrinking pool of available newspaper readers.

There is irony in finding that the industry's own researchers, most notably Clark (1980), Bogart (1985), and Urban, (1985) evolved in their thinking and began to question the market-driven newspaper trends that they helped to launch. Despite the findings of these latter-day critics of market-driven newspapers, the marketing philosophy has become firmly ingrained into the newspaper management structure during the past decade and by all indications will likely only solidify and expand in many newsrooms. In essence, whether marketing, or readership studies, or serving the customers should have anything to do with newspaper journalism today is now a moot point. The marketers and editor/MBA's are here to stay. The question now is, to what extent and in which areas within the structure of the newspaper, should the marketing philosophy, theories, and strategies be employed. Although Stamm and Underwood's (1992) study on newsroom management and market-driven journalism was illuminating, this study took a broader view of the newspaper operation than just the narrow focus of market-driven newsroom management and included other newspaper departments, and most significantly, included the perceptions of readers to the market-driven newspaper.

Park (1929), Lasswell (1948), Wright (1986), and Boorstin (1987) all provided the historical building blocks of theory concerning the relationship between community and communication. These researchers provided a foundation for the theories of Stamm (1985) on community ties and newspaper use. Still, most of the research conducted to date pre-dates Stamm's three-part model and ignores the concept of the gaps and the roles that newspapers can play in bridging those gaps.

The definition of community tie has also embraced a number of concepts, and for ease of manageability, many newspaper researchers have focused on narrow areas (e.g., circulation as it relates to geographic or political boundaries for a community) and therefore have only touched the surface of community tie research. For example, the seminal studies concerning press and community were conducted by Janowitz (1952) and

Edelstein and Larsen (1960). Both of these studies involved weekly newspapers, as opposed to dailies, and both are more than 40 years old. Aside from Stamm's own 1985 study on the Seattle dailies, there is little qualitative research applying newspaper use and community tie theory to daily newspapers. Considering the accepted role played by newspapers in creating community, the scholarly studies documenting this role are few, dated, and haven't expanded thoroughly upon Stamm's model of community ties. The four predictors of community newspaper use identified by Rarick, Jeffres, Dobos, Stamm, and Weiss, provided key guideposts as this study evolved and members of the community shared the levels of their involvement in the Santa Cruz community.

Finally, the twofold structure of this study on the Santa Cruz community allowed the researcher to delve into the foundation of community tie perceptions of readers and at the same time investigate the mindset of the management staff of the *Sentinel*.

Although Bagdikian (1992), Morton (1984), and Willis (1988) certainly recorded alarming monopolistic economic trends among newspapers that are part of multi-faceted media companies, those researchers ignored the rich underbelly of community weeklies and the powerful overlap of regional dailies, that provide a robust competitive market in many communities. During the undertaking of those studies, the Internet and on-line services were only in their infancy, and hence their role in the competitive media mix could not even be considered.

Only Ertman (1985) broke with the conventional thinking, and argued that the monopoly press could offer advantages to readers and did not report with the view-with-alarm tone of the other three researchers.

Clearly it was Rosse's (1980) umbrella model of competition that provided a calming salve for the alarmists who deny that any true newspaper versus newspaper competition prevails today.

Research question. Certainly the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, like its counterparts at other group-owned newspapers, has been mobilized and aware of the techniques of newspaper survival today. The *Sentinel* produces targeted sections designed to appeal to specific consumer groups. Furthermore, they have shown with the willingness to undertake the types of readership research that Clark's first study concluded were vital to producing a desirable newspaper. Moreover the *Sentinel's* managers are mindful of competition, and the market situation in the county is nearly a textbook example of Rosse's umbrella model of newspaper competition. Although both of these provide theoretical building blocks for any study of today's newspapers, it is the issue of community attachment that is the linchpin theory explored in this thesis. In short, the *Sentinel's* flat readership in a county of modest annual growth brings to mind the general research question posed for this thesis: Why does the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* suffer from lackluster acceptance by readers in its community?

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

If a newspaper does not keep abreast of its changing market, it may fail. And, although it may sound simplistic, it is hard to get any news out to readers after a newspaper has folded for good. Therefore, proactive qualitative research into the *Sentinel's* readers and potential readers, at this crucial juncture, was designed to help determine the reasons for the newspaper's stagnant readership, and provide a practical blueprint for its robust survival. One of the barriers to effective qualitative research is often the lack of access to people and documents that would help to paint a picture of the organization under investigation. The researcher was fortunate to have the cooperation of the *Sentinel's* editorial management during the course of the study. (See Appendix 1).

For the primary field research part of the study, qualitative data were gathered through demographically-selected focus group meetings. The focus group meetings were designed to provide the researcher with a rich store of impressions, comments, and ideas regarding the state of newspapers in general and the *Sentinel* in particular, all filtered through the eyes of readers, former readers, or would-be readers. As Neuman (1994) noted, the meaning of a social action or statement depends on the context in which it appears, as well as sequence. Therefore, all focus group meetings and formally scheduled in-depth interviews were tape recorded by the researcher, with dates and times noted. Impromptu interviews with newspaper staff and telephone interviews with readers were not tape recorded although impressions and comments were recorded by the researcher in a notebook.

Focus groups. The chief data collection method used in the study were eight demographically distinct focus group meetings with both readers and non-readers of the *Sentinel*. The groups were as follows: (a) all female, (b) all male, (c) two male and female, (d) one young adult group, (e) one group from Scotts Valley, (f) one group of

senior citizens, and (g) one group of *Sentinel* advertisers. Attempts were also made to organize a south Santa Cruz County/Watsonville meeting and a high school meeting. The former failed because of the lack of interest despite cold calling, letters, and an attempt to work through civic and fraternal organizations in the Watsonville area; the latter failed because of the less-than-enthusiastic cooperation from two local high schools. In mid-August, 1995 it was decided to not try to organize those last two meetings, and instead concentrate on the data collected in the other eight meetings.

Subjects were initially recruited in February and March, 1995 for the first focus group meeting, which was held April 29, 1995. Subsequent meetings were held May 27, June 3, June 10, June 24, June 29, June 30 and finally, July 1, 1995. Each meeting lasted about 90 minutes, and all were held at the *Sentinel* offices, except the June 29 meeting, which was held at the Scotts Valley Senior Center.

Recruitment. Focus group participants were recruited to participate in the study through a number of methods. Research subjects were initially recruited through a small newspaper advertisement in the *Sentinel*. Seven persons responded to the newspaper advertisement. Of these seven, five expressed interest in the study and four ultimately participated in a focus group meeting. This newspaper advertisement was followed up with 300 letters of invitation. The first mailing was made to a computer-generated random list of 150 *Sentinel* subscribers and 150 former subscribers provided to the researcher by the *Sentinel*'s circulation department. Response was slow but steady to this mailing. The former subscriber mailing resulted in 58 being returned with the postal message that the forwarding order had expired. It is unknown how many others from that list were forwarded outside the *Sentinel* circulation area. In subsequent mailings, only current subscriber lists were used. Another 38 persons who had participated in a recent telephone survey undertaken by the circulation and advertising departments were

contacted by telephone. These subjects had indicated a possible predisposition to participating in the type of study that was being undertaken.

The letters of invitation were written on San Jose State University School of Journalism and Mass Communications letterhead and co-signed by the researcher and Dr. Diana Stover, San Jose State University journalism professor. (See Appendix 2). The letters stressed the opportunity being provided for members of the Santa Cruz County community to comment on their local newspaper. These letters described the importance of the study, promised anonymity, and asked interested persons to phone the researcher's local voice mail for more information. The researcher checked the voice mail daily, and would immediately follow-up with those who had expressed interest in participating in the study. Aside from light refreshments and a *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* coffee mug, no other inducements were offered to participants. Throughout the recruitment process and during the focus group meetings, the independence of the researchers from the *Sentinel* and privacy for the subjects were emphasized in an effort to encourage candid comments, and to increase the likelihood that persons would agree to participate in the meetings. In late March, 1995, Tara Murphy, also a San Jose State University Mass Communications graduate student, joined with the principal researcher in arranging focus group meetings. Murphy also assisted in preparing a three-page questionnaire that was administered to subjects prior to each focus group meeting. Murphy used some of the data from the focus group meetings to complete her graduate project, a proposed redesign of the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*.

As Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) observed, it is important to keep focus group meetings to a maximum size of 12. The presence of more than a dozen participants does not afford enough opportunity for all individuals to participate actively. Stewart and Shamdasani also cautioned researchers to assume that at least two participants will not show up for the meeting.

For this study at least eight participants were confirmed for each meeting to allow for no-shows. As expected, the focus groups averaged six participants. Participants were sent confirmation letters and were reminded with courtesy telephone calls and enthusiastic thank-yous-in-advance the night before the meetings, but no-shows still occurred.

Recruitment for the final four meetings was handled somewhat differently than it was for the first four meetings. The researcher had learned a bit more about the community and tried to target those areas with a traditionally less transient population in his recruitment methods. A mailing to another 150 persons in the southern area of the county and to the Scotts Valley area, in concert with “cold calling” recruitment over the telephone was used for the recruitment for the June 24 and July 1 meetings. The focus group meetings were scheduled on Saturday mornings, and as late winter gave way to spring and summer-like weather, the number of no-shows seemed to increase with the rising temperature.

Two meetings involved very specific groups, advertisers and senior citizens, and these two meetings proved to be the easiest to coordinate. The meeting on June 30 was recruited over the telephone from lists of current and former *Sentinel* advertisers that were provided by the advertising manager. The meeting of June 29 was held at the Scotts Valley Senior Center and arranged in cooperation with the manager of that facility.

Although not all letters or phone calls resulted in a willing study participant, some persons who were unable to attend a focus group meeting did agree to complete a mailed survey, and still others freely offered comments regarding the *Sentinel* over the telephone. In all, 40 persons participated in focus group meetings, 28 females and 12 males. The oldest focus group participant was 79 and the youngest, 25. Only three were under the age of 36, and most were in their late 40s and 50s (ignoring the senior citizens group, which was entirely composed of people over age 65). These ages, and the gender breakdown were indicative of the other 30 persons who agreed to participate, but were no

shows. In addition to data collected during the meetings, 20 subjects agreed to complete and return a survey by mail, and the comments of another 36 persons were recorded by the researcher as a result of impromptu telephone interviews. These telephone interviews were conducted with persons who evidenced interest in participating in the study (by responding to the letter and calling for more information), but who balked at the time commitment of coming to the *Sentinel* office, or with those contacted by cold calling, who offered unsolicited but informative comments on the *Sentinel*. Another four persons left their comments on the researcher's voice mail, but subsequent attempts to contact them for further comment were fruitless.

All focus group meetings were moderated with a similar format. Participants were greeted at the lobby of the *Sentinel* and escorted to the upstairs meeting room, where they were offered light snacks and beverages. For about 20 minutes before the focus group discussion, participants were asked to complete a short demographic profile, which asked demographic questions and briefly gauged those areas of the *Sentinel* that the subject enjoyed most. (See Appendix 3). Most of the data collected in this survey was used by Tara Murphy, graduate student, in the planning of her redesign of the *Sentinel*.

Following a short introduction by the researcher and a description of the study's purpose, each participant was asked to tell the others in the group briefly about themselves and their reading habits.

Bearing in mind the erosion of readers that was noted in the introduction to this study, and with an understanding of the commuting patterns of Santa Cruz residents, the discussion then explored themes that centered on:

- a) the focus participant's view of their local community;
- b) their place within the community; and,
- c) their perception of the *Sentinel* as a link to the local community.

In addition, the researcher posed questions that delved into the specific likes and dislikes of the focus group participants, as well as suggestions for improvement to the newspaper, and the hypothetical scenario that the *Sentinel* would stop publishing entirely. (See Appendix 4)

Staff interviews. As part of the study, formal scheduled interviews were conducted with several key department heads within the newspaper between June 26 and July 3, 1995. These interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. These department managers were asked about their education and experience, and how they came to the *Sentinel*. They were also asked about newspaper operations, interdepartmental workings, and their expectations for the future of the *Sentinel*. The list of personnel recorded in formal interviews included the following:

Advertising Manager Karen Carnot

Editor Tom Honig

City Editor Donald Miller

Managing Editor Stan Hojnacki

Publisher David Regan

Photo Editor Bill Lovejoy

In addition to these formal scheduled interviews, informal interviews with reporters, editors, and support staff were also conducted at various times during the study period. Management did assure the reporting staff that there would be no retaliation for comments made to the researcher. Still a clear distinction is drawn between editors and reporters in the newsroom hierarchy. Reporters gather news and editors establish policies that determine the criteria for news decisions and story selection. Although editors usually have news reporting backgrounds, they function more often as managers than reporters. Hence, several respondents within the editorial department preferred to remain anonymous, and only agreed to speak under this condition of confidentiality. In an effort

to gain as much data as possible, the researcher agreed to this arrangement with several informal interview subjects.

Other qualitative data. The researcher also conducted impromptu personal interviews on the mornings of June 26 through June 28, 1995 in front of the Rio Market in Aptos to gauge newsstand purchasing habits at a spot that offers eight newspaper options. The researcher stationed himself in front of the newsstands from 6:30-9 a.m. and simply questioned newspaper buyers on their reasons for selecting a specific newspaper, their age, and their city of residence.

Other supporting data. The competitive media environment in the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel's* circulation area, and its effect upon both readership and strategic management of the newspaper could not be overlooked in this study. However, unlike other elements of this study, this portion of the research relied upon the review of a variety of internal and external printed materials. These materials included copies of competing media, *Sentinel* marketing materials, previous *Sentinel* marketing studies and information from the Audit Bureau of Circulation and Standard Rate & Data.

One key to successful qualitative research lies in the thoroughness and relevance of the notes taken by the researcher. Because of the volume of data, the researcher was careful to jot down impressions and record impressions closely following each focus group meeting. The audiotape of the focus group meeting was listened to, and while still fresh in mind, the researcher would visualize the tone, and body language that accompanied particular statements and criticisms from particular subjects. These impressions and observations were entered into a word processing program, and divided into outline form to coincide with common areas of discussion across all focus group meetings. This proved to be an excellent, if somewhat time-consuming, way to distill the gist of what subjects were trying to communicate about the *Sentinel*.

Critics of qualitative research sometimes question the reliability and validity of qualitative studies because subjective judgments are used to select research subjects and to collect the data. The researcher spent almost four months planning this research project. A printed survey instrument was used as a preface to each focus group meeting, to provide empirical documentation of the themes that emerged in more detail from the study's meetings. Themes to be explored, both in the focus group meetings and in the interviews were reviewed with professors of mass communication at San Jose State University and newspaper managers at the *Sentinel*. Furthermore, since the Ruth Clark studies had been sanctioned by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the American Newspaper Publishers Association, and her studies are quoted often in the scholarly literature, it was decided to use her framework as a foundation for questions during the *Sentinel* focus group meetings.

Since it was a three-hour drive from the researcher's home to the newspaper being studied, much work in the planning and early execution was conducted by mail, facsimile, or telephone. It became apparent during the planning of the study, that to record useful data from both readers and *Sentinel* staffers, professional independence and a certain degree of trust would have to be established. The researcher was careful to always point up the fact that the study was being conducted independent of the *Sentinel*. Letters of solicitation and confirmation were, for example, printed on San Jose State University letterhead, and telephone contacts were always begun with "Hello, my name is Gary Giacomo. I'm a graduate student studying the readers of the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*." Likewise, within the newspaper, independence from management was also stressed.

Because of the distance from the researcher's home to the *Sentinel*, a careful adherence to appointments and commitments was vital. As the date for the first focus group meeting approached, the researcher spent some time in the area to become familiar

with the everyday routines of the county and its different communities. By the completion of the study, the researcher had spent 24 single days in the county and additionally spent the entire week of June 24 to July 2, 1995 in the county.

One way to strengthen qualitative research is to follow the recommendation of Yin (1994) to conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder. The researcher, was careful, therefore, to plan a research calendar/schedule, keep copies of all correspondence related to the study design, and to keep telephone log books of all communication related to the study. If another study of the *Sentinel* were undertaken, it would certainly be possible, given the researcher's documentation, to replicate most of the research procedures.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview of Primary Findings.

Stamm's (1985) theory of community attachment implies that spatial, political, social, and information gaps can be bridged by a community's newspaper. The general appearance of these four representative gaps was the most significant finding that emerged from this study. These four gaps and the role of the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* in successfully or unsuccessfully bridging them was readily apparent in analyzing both the focus group data and the *Sentinel* management interview data.

As an institution and as an arm of the mass media, a newspaper touches a community in several ways. Although it is foremost an information source for a community, a newspaper is also a business and a local employer. To function as a successful business, a newspaper must be cognizant of its market and its competition. Secondly for many readers, a newspaper is also a source of entertainment, and provides a forum for political debate. Readers bring their own biases, cultural identity, economic status, education, and sense of community involvement to their reading experience, and it is this community patchwork of subcultures and microcommunities that provides the most vexing problems for the *Sentinel's* editors and managers. In the simplest terms that both media critics and working newspaper managers would agree: the readers' perception of their newspaper is the key to success. Accepting this premise, two general themes of *Sentinel* readers surfaced during an analysis of the research data:

1. The *Sentinel*, for better or for worse, is the only local source of news in Santa Cruz County. No other single medium could replace it, should the *Sentinel* cease to publish.

2. The *Sentinel's* problems with community acceptance are not unique to this newspaper. The issues of time and money, common at many stagnated newspapers throughout the world are however somewhat exacerbated by the fact that *Sentinel* must compete with the *San Jose Mercury News*, one of the best regional daily newspapers in the state.

Secondarily two general themes of *Sentinel* management and other employees who seek to serve their readers, were identified during analysis of the research data:

1. The *Sentinel's* editors and managers are aware of their economic limitations and their historical credibility problems in the community, but still they try to do the best they can with the resources that they have.

2. The old rules of newspapering are changing. The *Sentinel* must truly live up to its motto of being the local source for news, and moreover, it must seriously ask at each step of the newsgathering and presentation process: Are we giving the readers something useful and unique?

Physical observations. The two-story *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* building and parking lot occupies nearly a quarter of a city block at the corner of Center and Church streets in downtown Santa Cruz. Inside, 120 employees work, writing, printing, and distributing the daily *Sentinel*. The ground floor houses advertising, circulation, and data processing departments. Upstairs are the newsroom, pre-press production, and administrative offices. The presses are located in the bowels of the building. The building features an open and airy lobby with huge two-story windows to let in the natural light. This well-lit newspaper office stands as a physical metaphor for the newspaper that seeks to shed light on issues and people throughout the diverse community of Santa Cruz County. Only two blocks away, workers continue rehabilitation of buildings that were severely damaged in the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989. A city parking garage is located

two blocks away, but many *Sentinel* employees have no need to patronize it. They benefit from a company-owned free parking lot directly across from the newspaper offices.

A small but diverse county. According to a study commissioned for the *Sentinel* by Market Opinion Research (1995), Santa Cruz County is home to a population of 237,000 living in an estimated 84,800 households. The county occupies a mere 446 square miles, ranking 57th out of California's 58 counties; in terms of physical area only San Francisco County is smaller. The two largest cities are Santa Cruz with a population of 49,900 and Watsonville with 31,800. The county features 44 miles of Pacific Ocean coastline to the west, the rugged Santa Cruz Mountains in the northeast and lesser Coast Range mountains in the southeast that form a natural border with neighboring Santa Clara County to the east. Rural San Mateo County borders the north and agricultural Monterey County borders the south.

The county can be subdivided into three distinct geographical areas, the urban Santa Cruz city and associated central beach communities, the northern Santa Cruz Mountain communities bisected by State Highway 17, and the largely rural more sparsely occupied southern county agricultural towns.

With the county seat of Santa Cruz city as its metropolitan anchor, the urban hub of the county sprawls south along State Route 1 including the incorporated city of Capitola, and unincorporated beach communities of Soquel, Aptos, Rio Del Mar, and La Selva Beach. The 2,000-acre campus of the University of California, Santa Cruz, borders the northern end of Santa Cruz city limits. Five state park beaches and the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk amusement park attract tourists throughout most of the year.

The affluent community of Scotts Valley lies to the north and east of the city of Santa Cruz along State Route 17, or "17" as locals refer to it. Although Scotts Valley is a bedroom community for both Santa Cruz and Santa Clara Valley commuters, it is also a high technology center in its own right, being the home of both Borland, a large software

company, and Seagate, a major manufacturer of computer disk drives. Most of this part of the county is viewed at either 10 miles per hour or 50 miles per hour, depending on the time of day, from behind the steering wheel of cars piloted along Highway 17. Highway 17 is the main highway connector over the Santa Cruz Mountains and into the sprawling and highly urbanized Santa Clara County, the home of Silicon Valley's many high technology industries. Highway 17 is a steep, winding, narrow--some would say treacherous--four-lane highway that has been little improved in the past 30 years. But for an estimated 12,000 persons daily it is the road that must be navigated from home in Santa Cruz County to work. Besides Scotts Valley, other smaller Santa Cruz Mountain communities include Bonny Doon, Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Felton, and Zayante, which hug State Route 9 as it winds and twists its way north and east in a circuitous route toward the Santa Clara County communities of Saratoga and finally into Los Gatos.

The southern part of the county is largely agricultural and blue-collar. Anchored by Watsonville, the less affluent unincorporated communities of Corralitos, Freedom, Pajaro, and Aromas are linked over the Coast Range mountains to southern Santa Clara County via state highways 152 and 129. Cash crops include strawberries, lettuce, artichokes, and broccoli. The Watsonville community is home to an expanding Hispanic population that is primarily employed either directly in agriculture or in food processing industries. Watsonville's older commercial buildings suffered greatly during the Loma Prieta earthquake, and parts of it have yet to be rebuilt. Watsonville is the home of the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, the only other daily newspaper published in the county.

It is in this almost Disneyland-like county, that the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* publishes its daily product, hoping to capture the attention of newspaper readers who live in these three very different geographical worlds, and the various subcultures that exist in each. It's a tough order to fill and the *Sentinel* has been struggling for some time to fill it. In 1979, the *Sentinel* had an ABC-audited daily circulation of 24,738, and a circulation of

27,005 on Sunday in a county with a population of 170,851. At this writing, the county's population stands at 237,000 and the *Sentinel's* daily ABC-audited circulation is 27,422 and 30,164 on Sunday. Despite nearly a 39% increase in population since 1979, the *Sentinel's* daily circulation has only increased by about 11% in the ensuing years.

If the diverse physical and geographical differences of Santa Cruz County weren't enough of a challenge, the *Sentinel* must also serve a readership that is so varied that it takes on an Alice-in-Wonderland quality as it is examined in more detail. The median age of residents is 33, and 38% of residents have lived in the county for less than 10 years. In Santa Cruz County the median price for a home is \$172,000; however, only 31% of households have annual incomes exceeding \$50,000, which may explain why nearly half of the population are not homeowners. More than 70% of the county's adult residents have at least attended college, a demographic statistic that should bode well as a benchmark for the number of potential newspaper readers.

Santa Cruz, where the '60s came and stayed? The politics of Santa Cruz city is unapologetically liberal, earning the city the nickname "Berkeley-by-the-Bay," and much of the county leans to the left in its political philosophy. Of course, such a prevailing political demographic, which emerged with the establishment of the University of California campus in 1965, was often at odds with the conservative editorial positions taken by the *Sentinel* when it was operated by the McPherson family. The conservative political leanings of the McPhersons in the face of a changing political philosophy obviously did not ingratiate the *Sentinel* to many in the newly-emerging left-leaning community and its growing liberal political power base. Certainly some of today's credibility problems can be traced back to the days when the newspaper's political philosophy was obvious, not only from the editorial pages, but the news pages as well. Many persons contacted to participate in focus groups meetings, disparagingly referred to the newspaper as "the *Santa Cruz Senile*" and indicated the *Sentinel* was woefully

out-of-touch with, at least their perception, of the community. Despite the fact that the political landscape moderates a bit when one ventures out of the city of Santa Cruz, and the fact that the *Sentinel* is a county-wide newspaper, political coverage of the liberal Santa Cruz City Council does tend to dominate local political news in the newspaper. Given the friction between the political power base of Santa Cruz liberals and the *Sentinel*, it is somewhat ironic that Bruce McPherson, a moderate Republican, was twice elected to the state assembly from Santa Cruz. Term limits are forcing McPherson from his assembly seat, and in November, 1996 he was elected to the state senate seat that was held for many years by Democratic Senator Henry Mello of Santa Cruz.

The researcher anticipated that the history of true or perceived conservative political bias under the McPherson regime might come up during the study, and therefore each focus group participant was asked to identify their political philosophy in terms of liberal to conservative at the outset of all focus group meetings and telephone interviews.

Community attachment: Hey, it's just a zip code. With an estimated 12,000 county residents making the daily commute over the Santa Cruz mountains to San Jose and the Silicon Valley, the entire idea of deep personal roots and a stake in the local goings-on has to be called into question. The *Sentinel* has taken a very vocal marketing position as the newspaper of record for all of Santa Cruz County and as the only source for local news. But for many of the commuters to the Silicon Valley, the price of cheap Japanese semiconductors and the affect on their high tech jobs is more important than what went on at the local Santa Cruz planning commission meeting. To these commuters home has become a refuge from the daily rat race encountered "over the hill" in the Silicon Valley. The status associated with living or not living in certain Santa Cruz County communities also seems important to these commuters.

Six former readers, contacted by telephone to participate in focus group meetings, turned the researcher down because they did not identify with Santa Cruz which they

viewed as somewhat off-center, and moreover they did not even want to be associated with Santa Cruz. Despite the *Sentinel's* position that it is a county-wide newspaper, these former readers viewed the *Sentinel* as a city newspaper from a city that they did not hold in high regard. They had all quit reading the *Sentinel*, because they felt it did not accurately reflect the community, or were upset with coverage that did not reflect the majority of people living in the county. All except one had lived in the county for 15 years or more.

The comments of Bill, a 58-year-old auto mechanic, Santa Cruz city native and self-described political moderate (“anywhere else, I’d be labeled a liberal,” he said), who now lives in Aptos typified their feelings and the feelings of other non-Santa Cruz city residents who did agree to participate in focus group meetings:

I don’t live in Santa Cruz. I live in Aptos. I don’t care what goes on in Santa Cruz--the city I mean. I really don’t. The city is run by crackpots and it has turned Santa Cruz into a kind of place that people joke about. You know it’s like, just what fool thing are they going to do next? So I don’t read the *Sentinel* because that’s the Santa Cruz paper, you know? I stopped reading it about six years ago because I’d read about some goofy thing the city was up to and I just got really mad. I read the *San Jose Mercury News* now everyday. Even though I was born and raised there--in Santa Cruz, you know I’m really kind of ashamed of that city now and of what politicians and wacky college professors, and the students have done to it. When people ask me where I live I tell them Aptos. Hey, it’s just a zip code, but hell, at least it’s not Santa Cruz.

Comments like Bill’s and others who hold a low opinion of the city of Santa Cruz could explain some of the *Sentinel's* problem in reaching certain sectors of the community. On the surface, Bill would seem like the best customer or potential customer for the *Sentinel*. He is a life-long county resident who already has a newspaper reading habit. However, the newspaper’s very name conjures up a negative image in his mind. He has seen some dramatic social and political changes in the community, and they largely do not appeal to him. He would prefer to disassociate himself from the community by

reaching for an out-of-county paper, rather than be reminded daily of what's going on locally. Those focus group subjects and telephone interview subjects who echoed the comments of Bill all tended to be long-time residents and natives to the area. Certainly not all long-time Santa Cruz county residents have lost pride in their community, but some have lost faith in the *Sentinel* to bring an accurate reflection of the community into their homes. The following comment was from Susan B., a 40-year-old homemaker and Santa Cruz County native from Soquel. She holds a journalism degree and referred to herself as politically conservative. She canceled her *Sentinel* subscription about two years ago, and during the focus group meeting of April 29, 1995 explained why:

I think there were some very poor choices made. For example, I do take a lot of pride in being a fourth-generation Santa Cruz County person, and I get extremely offended by people that, you know, move here and want to change it into what it is they moved away from. There's a celebration the first week in October centered around the mission. And it's about the history of Santa Cruz County and it includes a parade, or it has in years past. It's a wonderful celebration, and they have all kinds of things set up on the native Americans and tortilla making and the combination of the Mexican missionaries that came in and the native Americans. And as I said, it includes a parade. Now I pick up the paper, after having been at that celebration with my young family, the next morning, and all I see are these huge pictures of half-dressed gay men. I mean the only reporting on this entire event about the history of Santa Cruz County is about these half-dressed gay men and the part that they took in the parade, I mean that was the majority of the report on this celebration on the history of Santa Cruz. And there was just a bent in the newspaper, there were certain small segments of the community that they were giving undue credence to, and I don't know, maybe the paper had felt they had been biased against them for awhile, but, to me, not only was it offensive, it was just plain bad journalism.

Build a better newspaper and they will come. Bad journalism, or incomplete reporting, was a frequent criticism heard from research subjects. Many subjects made the apples to oranges comparison of the *Sentinel's* reporting with that of the Pulitzer Prize winning *Mercury News*. Still others offered concrete examples and offered suggestions to

make the *Sentinel's* reporting more professional and thorough, if not as polished as the large regional daily.

In response to the question of whether the group felt *Sentinel* editors were "out of touch" with the community, (a question which was posed to all groups), the consensus view that would work to dispel this idea and the idea that the newspaper is biased, was articulated well by Susie, a 44-year-old UCSC writing professor and daily reader from Santa Cruz, who described herself politically as very liberal:

It wouldn't matter if the *Sentinel* editors were out of touch or not. If they would require their reporters to talk to enough people that would go a long way to solving the issue of bias. They just aren't talking to enough people, and if you write a news story and you talk to enough people and you get enough points of view in, then you can address the diversity in the county. It's just a simple matter of work and phone calls . . . not a matter of what control the McPherson's or Canfield's might still have. If you do good reporting, and your editors require it and make time for it, then all of that can be undercut because various people in the community would get to have a say in the content of the news. But like on the Watsonville Hospital story, if they're just going to call up the head of the union and head of the hospital, that's just two phone calls, that's not reporting.

Taking care of business. During the time that the researcher was conducting this study, the California economy was mired in one of the worst recessions in recent memory. High technology companies had gone through downsizings, and real estate prices statewide had plummeted. Santa Cruz County's economy certainly mirrored the statewide recession. The condition of the economy cannot be dismissed when considering one of the universal themes advanced during all of the focus group meetings--more and better business coverage in the *Sentinel*. The interest in more business coverage was articulated by men and women and by all age groups. Most research subjects didn't want business news confined solely to the business page, either. The impact of policy issues at the local government and state levels, and their effects on the local economy were also voiced as areas where the *Sentinel* could be an effective and more useful source of local news.

In much the same way that political scientists note that voters tend to “vote their pocketbooks” during uneasy economic times, so too, it seems that edgy newspaper readers will do the same in choosing papers that provide the most relevant economic information. Even relative newcomers to Santa Cruz County viewed economic and business news as sorely lacking in the *Sentinel*.

Mike, a political moderate from Capitola, who has lived in the county for about one year, spoke for many focus group members regarding the need for better general reporting and better business and economic coverage:

As someone who is relatively new here, I would like to understand more about the culture here and about the economy here and the loss of jobs. The loss of the high tech jobs, well I am aware of all that. But, you know, then I see stuff that the city council and board of supervisors squabble about and also the local policing agencies. I guess I'd like to see the newspaper do in-depth reporting on this and ask hard questions of the people who have the power to do something here. And that means, John [John was another focus group participant who was particularly critical of the *Sentinel*'s editorial positions, which he termed “usually reactionary”] that sometimes you're going to read stuff that you don't like and don't agree with, but I'd like to know all sides of the issues. [Others in the group nodded in agreement.] Here are some of the issues I hear about since I've moved here: the widening of Highway 17, and /or the construction of a railroad to go over the hill. So I listen to people who have lived here a long time and you hear very one-sided opinions that this guy Gary Patton (a county supervisor) killed the railroad deal because he wants to retain the rural nature of Santa Cruz County. And then you hear that this other guy wants the railroad to go in because he wants to do business development. And you know, somewhere in there, there's got to be a balance and that should be the function of this newspaper. But this paper doesn't deal with that stuff. It doesn't deal with “should we build a railroad over the hill?” or “should we widen Highway 17 and how will that impact the people in Boulder Creek and Scotts Valley and Felton and the rest of the county and how will it affect the county negatively and positively?” I think this is a problem with journalism in this county—talk radio included, maybe because it's a small folksy county, they don't ask the hard questions. The paper doesn't have to be an advocate, but they do have to ask the hard questions. Like “what are you guys doing to bring jobs back?”

The criticism of shallow, irrelevant or local business and economic reporting was echoed by a variety of voices in nearly every focus group meeting. Moreover, readers

were willing to take the good news along with the bad news, and felt that a good dose of local analysis of economic impact on the area would make the *Sentinel* a more useful news source.

Bill a 60-year-old daily reader, small business owner and advertiser from Santa Cruz who described himself politically as a liberal, wanted to make it clear he wasn't looking for fluff pieces on the business pages. What he wanted to see was just balanced, thorough, solid reporting of the issues in the business community:

I mean you could look at the business page and that's the worst business page that I can think of, the *Sentinel's*. It doesn't cover local business in any way shape or form other than in a very minor way. It does nothing to profile. If you know the business community, and I'm speaking just to that, if you know people who are here and the types of businesses that are here, there is a lot going on, there's a lot you could profile and that basically could be one or two pages that's all. I don't want the whole paper to be business, but I do want there to be a fair appraisal, and I don't mean fluff pieces.

Bright lights; little city: Too parochial. Although all newspapers must compete against some other newspapers in their communities, the *Sentinel* suffers from the fact that it competes with one of the state's best regional newspapers, the *San Jose Mercury News*. The comparisons are made daily when people choose newspapers to buy and read in Santa Cruz County. Admittedly the *Sentinel* is the source for local news, but many were critical of just how to approach the paper, and how well it seems to be managed.

Jack, a 42-year-old unemployed liberal reader from Santa Cruz made this statement in the focus group of June 3, 1995 which was comprised of all men:

The *Sentinel* is very much a don't call us, we'll call you type of newspaper. If you look at the *Mercury News*, every writer has an e-mail address in the paper, so you can contact them instantly and on many pages there are letters to specific section editors. I'd really like to see more two-way communication, and ways to leave voice-mail for reporters and editors.

Kerry, a 38-year-old political moderate from Scotts Valley, has been living in the county for 13 years. He is a newsstand reader, choosing between the *Sentinel* and the

Mercury News or *Chronicle* to read during his lunch break from work. He says he has watched the community change, but he doesn't feel that the *Sentinel* has kept pace with the changing sophistication in the county:

When it was owned by a family, I could understand when they behaved like a small family business, for example, and did things like not publishing on certain days of the year . . . but now they are owned by a company that specializes in running newspapers, and I expected to see changes for the better. For example, publishing 365 days a year. I expect them to upgrade their status to a bigger time newspaper without losing their small town feel. I think they can do it, but they have to give it some thought. They have a lot of resources, and here's a good example of them not using their resources. The day after the 49ers won the Superbowl was the day I wanted to read a lot of sports coverage. They had about three pages total of sports, and the *Mercury* had about 20 pages of sports, and this is a good example of why I often, penny-for-penny will choose another newspaper.

There was a feeling of parochialism felt especially by newcomers to the community. Being the source of local news, they argued, doesn't mean that the *Sentinel* can't be professional and smart about its presentation. This criticism was leveled quite vocally by readers who had only lived in the area five years or less. Debbie, a 44-year-old, political moderate and educational administrator from Santa Cruz, who had lived in the community for seven months, said this parochial approach really affects the usefulness of the *Sentinel*'s information, especially in the Best Bets calendar/events column: "The paper seems to assume that everyone knows where stores, parks, schools, and other landmarks are located instead of giving addresses. A little area map would be nice, but at the very least they need to include an address."

Credibility, bias, image. A pervasive criticism of the *Sentinel* from focus group respondents dealt with the McPherson family and the family's perceived influence on the paper's editorial decisions. Despite the fact that the paper was purchased by Ottaway Newspapers in 1982 and that the McPherson's have not been involved in the day-to-day operation of the newspaper since 1993, old ideas, it seems, die hard.

During the study period, the researcher sat in on several page one meetings. The editorial management staff is very conscious and concerned about not giving the appearance of favoritism to Republican Assemblyman Bruce McPherson in its news pages. For example, in one Associated Press story dealing with campaign contributions to local politicians, the editors cautioned against running the story, which outlined substantial contributions to Democratic Senator Henry Mello, unless a sidebar on contributors to Assemblyman McPherson could also be assembled and run. The discussion which lasted nearly seven minutes centered on the criticism the *Sentinel* might receive for 'bashing' Mello, while ignoring McPherson. Ultimately, the AP story did not run.

Scholars have debated the issue of bias for years, and as Shoemaker and Reese (1991) observed, standard and accepted journalistic routines can lead from subtle biases to propagandistic reporting.

The charge of "news bias" invariably surfaced in every focus group meeting. The researcher requested that the participants give clear examples of news bias. Furthermore, the researcher explained that the editorial page by its nature should have a point of view, since it is an opinion page and its positions are clearly staked out. Not surprisingly, a clear trend of bias on the *Sentinel's* news pages was difficult for the focus group members to note. This recurring criticism is not an indictment of the *Sentinel* alone, and probably represents the public's feeling toward all media.

Local history may have had something to do with the sometimes passionate charges of bias that would surface during focus group meetings. Santa Cruz city has a well-deserved reputation of being a politically liberal town, and the *Sentinel's* editorial pages, at least in the past, reflected a conservative slant. The researcher was careful to look critically at the possible political ax to grind that some participants may have brought to the focus meetings. Interestingly, when one or two participants began to try to dominate the meeting--trying to turn it into a political harangue, it didn't take long for

others in the group, of all different political bents, to help moderate the discussion. This helped to get through to the real problems with bias. Several politically liberal participants were critical of the newspaper because they felt the editorials and political endorsements were too conservative for their tastes. This, of course is not news bias. Some, though, who had stopped reading the *Sentinel*, were flabbergasted to learn that the newspaper had actually endorsed Bill Clinton in the 1992 election.

And actually, all longtime readers, regardless of their political leanings, said the editorial page has improved since the McPherson's have left the newspaper. Even those who described themselves politically as liberal admitted that today they often find issues that they agree with on the *Sentinel's* editorial pages. The old timers say that would never have happened under the McPherson's and (for those liberals who are still reading) this seemed to be an important change.

The entire issue of credibility and bias on the news pages seemed to be a bigger problem for those who have lived in the county for a longer period of time, remembered the pre-Ottaway *Sentinel*, and felt the McPhersons were, as one subject put it, "protecting their wealthy Republican friends." Newcomers to the Santa Cruz area felt this is less of a problem. Possibly the most politically cohesive and vocally critical focus group was an all men's group that was comprised of mostly those who had lived in the county more than 10 years. This group felt that there was an underreporting of crime news designed to protect the tourist trade. This group identified politically with liberal causes and felt that crime was really a result of a) the poverty problem in downtown which is underreported by the *Sentinel*, and b) wealthy slumlords that they identified as the Rittenhouse and Canfield families who exacerbate the problem and are being indirectly protected by the *Sentinel*. The other groups dismissed any type of news reporting conspiracy on the part of the *Sentinel*, and actually have felt that despite its shortcomings, the *Sentinel* has made real progress toward serving a diverse readership in the last few years.

Susie, a 40-year-old politically liberal marine biologist from Bonny Doon, who has lived there for 12 years, has dropped from daily reading to Saturday and Sunday, citing lack of time to read. She said she has noticed a positive change in terms of balance on the editorial page: "I almost find their reporting more conservative than their editorials. I am surprised that I often find myself agreeing with their editorials, and I consider myself a liberal."

Debbie, a 52-year-old political liberal from Santa Cruz, who participated in the advertiser focus meeting echoed the thought on news quality and bias as it might affect advertising purchases. She had canceled her subscription two years ago over what she felt was incomplete reporting and had only started daily reading two months earlier. As she spoke, the other advertiser/readers in the focus group nodded in agreement:

I think for all of us we have limited (advertising) budgets and there is a relationship, I believe, between the reporting part of the paper and the advertising part of the paper, and I think that if the *Sentinel* improved its reporting, it would have a positive effect on the advertising. I was one of the people who didn't subscribe. The only reason I subscribe now is because of my new position and I need to read it every day now. And there are many people in the target audience for all of us that are not subscribers because of the quality of the paper.

Shallow reporting. Not going deep enough into a local story or getting "the whole story" as one former reader noted was another recurring theme voiced at meetings. An observation that surfaced in all meetings was that reporters were not digging deep enough and relying too heavily on "official spokespeople." Again, part of this criticism was the result of comparing local stories that appear in the *Mercury's* Santa Cruz County edition with some *Sentinel* stories. The focus group participants felt that the *Sentinel* management needed to demand better reporting from writers.

Susie, the UCSC writing professor, used a story on a possible hospital closure as an example of *Sentinel* reporting that is just too shallow:

The story today about Watsonville Hospital has quotes from the union head and the hospital and nothing from nurses facing layoffs or patients who will be affected, or critics of managed care. Too many local stories are like this, one or two sources that have important people talking to each other, instead of ordinary people describing how issues affect them. Having real people speaking would add complexity to the stories, reduce the inevitable bias, and make the paper truly local.

A 44-year-old political liberal and former daily reader and advertiser from Santa Cruz (who only had recently started up her subscription) gave this "bias" example:

I felt that there was a lot of bias a few months ago on strawberries and how you needed methyl bromide to grow the strawberries. We have organic strawberry growers in Santa Cruz County that grow wonderful berries and that side was never presented. They are very successful, they are doing it. So how can you say that you can't do it? So I was very concerned and I felt that piece was a very biased article when there were resources right here in the county that were not looked at.

The Sentinel and its people. Posted on the employee bulletin board in the *Sentinel* newsroom is the newspaper's mission statement. It reads:

The *Sentinel* is first and foremost a local newspaper. We strive to publish an intelligent account of events in Santa Cruz County and the world beyond in a way that is fair, accurate and fun to read. Santa Cruz is a diverse county, and we want to profit from that by presenting news that is relevant to that wide variety of readers.

Our goal is for our competitive edge to show through to our readers. Through clear graphics, bright headlines and clear writing, the *Sentinel* should stand out as the prime source for news and information in Santa Cruz County.

We want people to look forward to reading their morning *Sentinel*. (Honig, 1993)

Although one newsroom wag said that this mission statement is often ignored, its mere existence reflects an effort of the newsroom staff and editorial management to define their purpose in publishing the daily *Sentinel*.

Newspapers are unique among businesses. Like all businesses, they operate with the stated objective to make a profit. They profit, like other print or electronic news

gathering operations, by delivering an audience to advertisers. As Lacy, Sohn, and Wicks (1993) noted, what is unique about newspaper reporters and editors, however, is that making money is not the only, or even the primary, goal that motivates them. Other, less tangible factors, attract people to journalism. In Santa Cruz, being able to be a journalist in a beautiful part of the state, and in an area that was termed by several *Sentinel* staffers as “a great news area,” tends to lead to a more stable newsroom workforce than one might find at other small dailies across the country. Reporters and editors who start their journalism careers at the *Sentinel* have a tendency to stay at the newspaper for quite some time. This trend contrasts with the staff turnover found at many other small newspapers. Often at small dailies journalists will stay only long enough to gain a sizable number of good clips before moving on to a larger daily newspaper, a wire service, or other better paying communications positions in larger metropolitan areas.

However if a journalist loves the area, the *Sentinel* provides a good job in a county where good-paying local jobs are scarce. A starting reporter at the *Sentinel* will make \$12 an hour and veterans will make close to \$20 an hour.

Despite Ottaway Newspaper’s and the *Sentinel*’s local management doing what appears to be a credible job of caring for their employees, it was the opinion of some in management that the workers didn’t appreciate their situation, as Managing Editor Stanley Hojnacki (1995) noted:

Readers, it seems to me, are talked about less around here than anything else. I’ll tell you, a lot of people are doing just enough to get by, to cover themselves. Sure things could be better, but people here don’t realize how good they have it. This is a very big newsroom staff for this size of paper.

The management of the Sentinel. David Regan, publisher of the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, occupies a spacious corner office on the second floor of the *Sentinel* building. He’s an affable publisher from the old school of newspaper publishers. A native of Norwalk, CT, he started as a printer when he graduated from high school in 1964 and

later became the printer's union president at the newspaper in Danbury, CT. He advanced through the ranks within the Ottaway newspaper group, and in 1983 he moved west and became the general manager at the *Sentinel*. In 1991 he became publisher coincident with the departure of the last McPherson publisher. His production background gave him an advantage in getting his initial job at the *Sentinel* since one of the first tangible changes Ottaway instituted upon purchasing the *Sentinel* was the installation of a new printing press.

Regan does bring a fresh perspective to the *Sentinel*, building upon his nearly 30 years in the business. As publisher he instituted an editorial board, and he talks daily with the editor concerning editorial positions that the *Sentinel* is going to take. He frequently will sit in on page one meetings and will act as final arbiter on editorial issues that may result in a deadlock by the editorial board. Unlike his predecessor, however, he carries no specific and obvious political agenda through the news or opinion pages. There is only one edict that he makes regarding an editorial position, and this is in regard to the death penalty. Regan is a strong supporter of the death penalty and so there is no debate on that issue as far as unsigned editorials in the *Sentinel*.

Regan says publishing a newspaper in California is a whole different ball game than publishing a newspaper anywhere else in the United States. He says the *Sentinel's* location, not just in California, but in this particular part of California, therefore poses special challenges, and calls for special strategies:

The problem is that Californians just don't read--our penetration is about 44% and that's pretty much what the state of California is. In the Midwest or on the East Coast you're looking at high 50s to high 60s among newspaper readers. I think the sun is out too much in California and people want their free time. When people say that California is different, it's true compared to other locations, especially when it comes to putting out a newspaper. Although we're a highly educated community it's a struggle to get the readers.

In late 1994 an interesting development occurred in Santa Cruz County's newspaper competition mix. The *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* was put up for sale by the Scripps Newspapers group. The small daily with a circulation of just over 10,000 had been struggling for some time. It could be argued that the *Pajaronian*'s heyday had been in 1953 when it won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service Journalism, and it has been on a steady decline ever since. Watsonville's demographics, discussed earlier in this paper, do not paint a rosy picture for someone trying to publish a newspaper. According to Regan, the asking price for the paper was \$3 million; however, it is believed to have been sold for much less. The *Pajaronian*'s real estate alone was valued at about \$1.5 million. The announcement of the sale did catch the eye of Regan and others in the Ottaway group. The operation made money by doing commercial printing of approximately \$300,000 a year, but viewed separately, the newspaper operation was a money loser, according to Regan.

Regan had given the *Pajaronian* situation a considerable amount of thought. The *Pajaronian* circulates 10,000 newspapers in southern Santa Cruz County. Regan had expected that it would have been merged with the *Herald*, also a Scripps paper. Instead Scripps decided to sell. While Regan likes the fact that there are 10,000 readers of the *Pajaronian*, he recognizes that the city of Watsonville and the general south county lacks the retail base to support a daily newspaper. Based on this economic reality, if the *Sentinel* had purchased the *Pajaronian*, it would have had to fold it, which, Regan felt, would have proven to be an economic as well as a public relations nightmare for the *Sentinel*.

Regan saw a business expansion opportunity in southern Santa Cruz County, but not through the purchase of the *Pajaronian*. About the time that the *Pajaronian* was sold to a small Midwest newspaper group, two fairly well compensated people had voluntarily left the *Sentinel*. Regan decided to invest those positions back into the newsroom in the

form of a south county bureau. The strategy seems to be paying off with south county circulation gains steadily growing, though a zoned edition subtitled the Pajaro Valley edition. As Regan noted: "I know that there are 10,000 newspaper readers down there to begin with, and I figure I have a chance to capture them."

The Ottaway way: No lousy newspapers. Publisher David Regan paraphrases the corporate mission statement from Ottaway in this manner:

From Ottaway corporate, they will basically tell you that you have complete local autonomy, but it doesn't give you the right to put out a lousy newspaper. The corporate management is really a hands-off management policy. There are two visits a year from the corporate operating vice president. It's really a three-hour meeting that is more of a social call. Really other than the budget review, the mission statement is to put out a good newspaper. By that they mean one that the reader uses and one that helps a community. Be the paper that people use and that helps your community. Make it entertain them and be the paper of record, that's really the easy mission. But to make it useful, a paper that is entertaining and sometimes irritating, that's a tougher challenge.

On the production side, the message from Ottaway corporate is more focused. The Ottaway long-term plan states that all newspapers will eventually have a total publishing system, one that incorporates pagination and an online newspaper in one package. The timetable is relatively loose, however, ranging from six to three years, depending upon the newspaper, according to Regan.

Other publisher's challenges. Regan's challenges are not all from competition. Operating expenses are also rising dramatically. The *Sentinel*, along with all newspapers, faced significant increases in newsprint prices during 1995. By June, 1995 the *Sentinel* had seen its newsprint bill rise by 72%. In actual dollars, this translated into \$865,000 spent on newsprint alone.

The high cost of newsprint has affected newspapers throughout the country in terms of their physical size, page counts, newshole, and also their investments in staff. Regan noted:

There was a time, not so long ago, that a newspaper could easily turn a 25 to 30% profit. Now it's down to 15, and there are some of us who wish we could see 15. We have reduced the workforce by about 10 people in the last year. We have to look for new revenues, but it's tough. Retail ad lineage is up by about 15%, but in 1990 we were running 26 pages of classifieds. Today we're lucky to see 15.

In an effort to deal with rising costs, the *Sentinel* raised its newsstand daily price in 1994 to 50 cents. Management's thinking was that if people wanted to get local news, they would just have to pay the additional 15 cents. Regan noted:

We expected everyone to follow. The *Chronicle* followed quickly, but the *Mercury* didn't follow, and still hasn't. We do, however, remain competitive (with the *Mercury News*) on home delivery at about 31 cents per day.

Every focus group mentioned the daily cost difference with the *Mercury News*. However, all groups also noted that the *Sentinel* was the only place to go for local news. Local readers, then, are caught between a rock and a hard spot, forced to pay the extra 15 cents for the smaller paper to get local news.

Use it, want it, bitch about it. *Sentinel* Editor Tom Honig, age 47, occupies a modest office located just off the *Sentinel* newsroom—a dimly-lit expanse of reporter's cubicles from which springs the daily *Sentinel*'s editorial product. One long window in his office looks out over this usually muted scene, where editorial staffers plink away at VDTs. His office is decorated with a photograph of a jazz musician blowing a trumpet and a Warner Brothers cartoon tribute to the late Mel Blanc. A low bookcase holds an eclectic collection of reference books, and his desk and in-basket is a continual study in disarray, from which, amazingly enough, he can pluck nearly anything at a moment's notice. He employs an open-door management policy, and often he can be seen walking around the newsroom talking to section editors and reporters. His is a shirt-sleeve editor's position, and he is responsible for the makeup of the editorial and op ed pages as well as the writing of editorials.

Following graduation from the University of California at Santa Barbara with majors in anthropology and geography, Honig returned to the Silicon Valley home of his parents without a clear focus of what he wanted to do. He did like sports and he did like writing, so he combined the two interests, landing a job as a sports stringer for the now-defunct *Palo Alto Times*. After a short sabbatical from the *Times*, he applied at a number of newspapers for sports writing jobs, and was ultimately hired as a police reporter for the *Sentinel* in 1972. In 1983 Honig became city editor, a position he held for six years. Honig recalled: "Up until that point I felt almost like I was just dabbling in journalism. But that position had the most influence on me, you make a commitment."

But six years in the job was enough. He then held positions as assistant managing editor and managing editor, until he was appointed to the editorship in 1993. The editorship of the *Sentinel* is not an ivory tower position, but a truly hands-on, shirt-sleeve occupation. The position, appears to fit the easy-going Honig to a tee, and actually helps him stay focused and relate to his newsroom charges:

I like being an editor who writes. And at most newspapers, I think the editor is the sort of, I don't know, either the manager or a public figure that goes to chamber of commerce meetings or manages problems in the newsroom and doesn't really practice journalism, and I think this arrangement helps me. It helps me to get closer to stories and to the staff, and it reminds me when people don't call you back and you need to talk to somebody and you can't get through to them and you're going nuts. And when you're an editor, you're saying "get that story in" and all of a sudden you see and remember the other side of it. So I think that has made me a better editor, being involved in the news.

On a political level, Honig is a firmly committed non-partisan, and he reiterates the local autonomy theme that is stressed by Ottaway corporate:

I really can only remember one directive from corporate and it came from Jimmy Ottaway. He said, "I want your papers to take a stand on abortion. I don't care if you're for it or against it, but stand up and be counted in your community." And you know if you looked at all of the Ottaway papers about half are left wing and about half are right wing.

Honig, aware of the old perceptions of the *Sentinel* as being too conservative, is careful to balance his editorials and selection of op ed commentary:

I have a news reporter's background and despite the fact that I'm writing editorials, I am really skeptical about both sides, and I enjoy editorials that kind of tweak each side.

Honig maintains that the *Sentinel* is truly independent and non-aligned, but he feels that it causes some confusion in the community. He acknowledges that some readers still think that the *Sentinel* is ultra-right wing although he personally doesn't think it was as extreme as some of the paper's critics seem to remember it. He does admit that reputations are tough for newspapers to shake. He answers critics of the *Sentinel*'s changing ways in this way:

I think sometimes we've made a mistake in trying to overreact. I think we went through periods of kind of "see how liberal we can be" and I think that's why we were running zillions of stories about gays, which I'm fine with. I mean it's happening in the community, but it has really angered some people. And I think we went a little too far--in not doing intelligent coverage on that. I mean we were doing stories on all kinds of out-there stuff, and body piercing, but shit, that's what newspapers do and newspapers are supposed to cover what's new and bizarre, but maybe we did a little too much. But now I'm worried that we're pulling back too much. I still feel that I know a good story when I see it.

When it comes to talking about competition, the other newspaper to beat is the *Mercury News*. But beyond printed competition, Honig tends to agree with Regan in viewing other competitors as time, nice weather, the beach, and talk radio. The competition is on Honig's mind as much as any of the *Sentinel* managers. Not surprisingly he believes that he's got the best local product, and he feels the readers know that too. He summarizes his feelings this way:

Radio in this county is so segmented, and there is no local TV. If you want to know about Santa Cruz County you need to expose yourself to the *Sentinel*. And there seems to be this core group of 28-to-30,000 people who then pass it along --that need it, want it, bitch about it--but still use it. I mean where else are you

going to get the stuff? The weeklies have backed off from hard news. I mean the *Good Times* puts this happy face take on every story.

Fighting the good fight. Honig admits that the *Sentinel* needs to do a better job on packaging a 'this is Santa Cruz County's take' on the world each day. He admits that locals can get their world and national news from other sources, and better, more detailed sources. He notes that the challenge for his newsroom is to "just be a little smarter about the stories that we do."

Honig acknowledges the limitations of his newsgathering staff. He noted the need for improvement, but makes no apologies. He said that part of the *Sentinel*'s problem in the community, in terms of flat circulation growth, can also be explained by the changing nature of society. As the person who acts as de facto ombudsman, as well as the person who edits the very lively *Sentinel* letters to editor page, Honig is in a unique position to comment on the collective psyche of his readers:

I must criticize society at large for a second—it is breaking down the ability to look at things objectively. Today, you're this or you're that. People think we're either horrible liberals or horrible conservatives. I get all kinds of letters to the editor saying "you liberals do this" and "you conservatives do that." And talk radio has really, really, spawned this as to identifying what you are. And I just don't think it's in people's heads anymore to look and see that this is a non-aligned explanation of something trying to inform you as best we can. And so, you know in this one way, I feel that I'm kind of fighting the good fight.

Tom Honig, in his interviews, seemed to reiterate the newsroom mission statement. There are some internal and external forces that keep the *Sentinel* from fulfilling every aspect of the mission statement daily, but Honig and his newsroom persevere. However, as evidenced by the community acceptance as reflected in circulation numbers, the paper is clearly not on target at all times in terms of producing a desirable and vital news product.

Chasing the advertisers: 218 media options. Advertising Manager Karen Carnot has been with the *Sentinel* since 1987. A native of Los Angeles, who graduated from the

University of California at Davis with a degree in agricultural economics, like her counterpart on the editorial side, she really didn't know what she wanted to do after graduation. She ended up working for the outdoor advertising company, Foster & Klieser, and later worked in public relations and legislative advocacy. Her first taste of newspaper advertising occurred when she was hired at the Gannett-owned paper in Summerville, NJ.

At the *Sentinel* she began work under publisher Fred McPherson, but has always worked under the Ottaway operation. Her outside sales force of eight work on a salary structure with 30% of take home pay comprised of commissions. Carnot has identified 218 media options in Santa Cruz County, including 68 publications. Most of these are niche publications and community weeklies. The Sunday *Sentinel*, along with its Total Market Coverage product *Marketplace*, reach 91% of the households in the county, which she matter-of-factly states, no other county media can do.

Faced with so many media options as competition, Carnot and her sales force are very dependent upon the *Sentinel* having strong circulation numbers coupled with gripping editorial content to help close sales:

What drives advertising, is being able to deliver a message to a large number of people. So really the ball is in news and circulation's court, before we can deliver a message.

The advertising department views the *Good Times*, a local free distribution alternative news weekly, as its major competition, especially for the coveted 18-to-34 year-old demographics. The *Good Times* was founded by an ex-*Sentinel* advertising staffer and all *Sentinel* managers acknowledge that the *Sentinel* underestimated or ignored the market. Although the news department generally dismisses *Good Times'* editorial product as "happy talk" Carnot and her staff take the little tabloid very seriously.

The advertising department has a clear understanding that it is the revenue producing arm of the *Sentinel*. Although clearly co-dependent on other departments in the newspaper, the advertising department's single-minded mission fits well with the hands-off attitude of Ottaway newspapers. In fact, Carnot has developed her own mission statement for advertising, which, stated simply, is to: "look for new business."

Other newsroom employees. Several other newsroom employees were interviewed in a formal setting or in impromptu sessions with the researcher. It was interesting to note the somber belief that although, for the most part, the *Sentinel* is a pretty good newspaper, its problems are indicative of larger problems facing all newspapers. These employees were aware that their industry and chosen profession is undergoing a profound change, and the future is not particularly bright.

City Editor Don Miller, 46, followed a less than straight and traditional journalistic path to his position at the *Sentinel*. A native of San Diego, Miller graduated from California State Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo, with a major in English. He moved to Santa Cruz where he described himself as "living off the land for a couple of years, and then worked building and selling spec houses." Double digit inflation in the late 1970s spelled doom for his house building enterprise, and in 1982 he started selling wood stoves in Santa Cruz. He met the ad representative from the *Sentinel* and mentioned to him that he had always wanted to write. So at age 34, Miller became, in his words, "the world's oldest sports stringer." He was soon hired full-time, and he moved up the editorial management ladder, being named assistant city editor in 1989 and in 1990 head copy chief. He was named city editor in 1991. He noted:

We haven't struck a nerve with the community and I'm not sure why that is. But you know the paper has improved dramatically. It was, when I first came here, poorly displayed and poorly written. There was a lack of direction and certainly a lack of community feel to it. It was a very drab product.

Photo Editor Bill Lovejoy, 46, is perhaps the most community-grounded newsroom employee at the *Sentinel*. Born and raised in Santa Cruz and a product of local schools and Cabrillo Community College and San Jose State University, Lovejoy started working at the *Sentinel* at age 13 as a sports stringer. In 1966 at the ripe old age of 16 he was hired full-time. His view of the *Sentinel* typifies what others said on and off the record:

About the future, here? I'm not overly optimistic, but I don't think it's the *Sentinel* per se, but newspapers in general. Readership is just declining everywhere. People, I think, would rather be told the news, or listen to the radio or pick it off the computer. However, I'm not really one to think that the Internet is going to be such a big deal, and that every one is going to spend three grand on a computer to get the news they want. Our biggest problem here is that we're squeezed pretty hard by some pretty good newspapers.

It was interesting to note how savvy the newsroom employees were about the general newspaper industry. Most newsroom employees viewed the competition as healthy and a bit exciting to have around. In the cat-and-mouse game of scoops and breaking stories, they alternately despised the competition for its effects on their newspaper's size, newshole, and circulation, and praised it for helping to keep them on their toes.

Managing Editor Stan Hojnacki, however, took a less us versus them view of the newspaper competition: "It's not about the other guy. It's all about serving the reader. That's the way you win people over."

What the Sentinel is doing right. Despite its shortcomings, the focus group meetings and interviews uncovered some areas in which the *Sentinel* was exceeding expectations of readers. The findings from the focus group meetings are summarized in the following broad categories of what the *Sentinel* does well and where the *Sentinel* can improve.

One of the simplest, shortest, and least controversial areas of the *Sentinel*, *Best Bets*, a short wrap-up of local events that will happen during the day, emerged as a universally loved part of the *Sentinel*. For many focus group participants, Best Bets was the single most useful part of the daily *Sentinel*. While comprehensive, Best Bets doesn't offer enough lead time to readers and this was a criticism. Many suggested that, for example, on Wednesday, a "happening Thursday" and "happening Friday" listing be added, and updated forward through the week. Also, subjects suggested that Best Bets, and other calendar information be published in one place and in the same place each day. An example of a calendar item posing as a news story came from the June 3 edition. That edition had a three-inch story headlined "Democrats to Host Benefit Bean Feed" on the top of page A-3. "That's an event and it belongs in a calendar," said one long-time reader. The front of the Bay Living feature section was suggested as a natural for Best Bets, as Bay Living was rated as one of the most popular sections of the *Sentinel*.

The Sentinel is the local source. *Good Times*, *Metro*, and other free and paid weeklies as well as the *Mercury News* do not provide the breadth of local coverage that the *Sentinel* does. It was noted that the *Mercury News* occasionally scoops the *Sentinel* but no one interviewed, even the harshest *Sentinel* critic, could name another media source that could replace the *Sentinel* if the newspaper were to disappear.

Great journalism. When asked to name standout journalism that the *Sentinel* has produced, most groups named the piece on Beach Flats, an impoverished area between downtown Santa Cruz and the Boardwalk amusement park, that was published in November, 1992. One participant said: "They need to do more pieces like that. It still stands out in my mind, that's the type of journalism that wins Pulitzers."

Another reader said: "This is what I want from a newspaper. It took the issues of racism and poverty in this community and put them into perspective, and the pictures were

beautiful. Really, when they put their efforts in-depth into an issue that has national relevance, the *Sentinel* can be wonderful.”

Another more recent piece that received high marks was a series on the city of Capitola's money woes. The multi-part series dealt with the mismanagement of the city's finances. Some were critical of its length, but all gave it high marks as being the type of local journalism that they would like to see the *Sentinel* produce on a regular basis.

Syndicated writers: Getting what they don't get elsewhere. Although focus group participants clearly perceived the *Sentinel* as the local source for news, no one cited a favorite local columnist. In an apparent acknowledgment of the competitive newspaper market in Santa Cruz County, readers appreciated seeing the work of syndicated writers that don't appear in the *Mercury* and *Chronicle*--even when they didn't agree with them.

Ellen Goodman received the most positive remarks, and Donna Britt was a close second, along with *New York Times* writers. Participants who were involved in some way with the high technology industry mentioned the comic strip, *Dilbert*, positively. The daily letters page in general, and the Sunday "community forum" style of the op ed pages also rated positively.

Price. There was universal displeasure voiced regarding the newsstand price of 50 cents in comparison to the *Mercury News* and its price of 50 cents. Some were willing to excuse the 50-cent price if there were fewer ads. Some subjects were critical of full page ads on page A-3, an area they felt should be reserved for more news.

More local news and better local news. A local general interest daily columnist was one suggestion that many long-time loyal readers wanted to see. Such a columnist, they thought, would help to connect the *Sentinel* to its community. Older readers and those who have lived in the community for awhile seemed to express the desire for something along this line, and they wanted to see the columnist up front (either on A2 or A3). Several old-timers (not necessarily old, but natives of Santa Cruz) feel that the

community has changed for the worst, and they believe that a local columnist would provide an avenue for profiles and comments about the good things and good news they feel is lacking in the rest of the newspaper. These people also generally wanted more good news and more positive news features. Just about every group noted that there should be more of these types of stories, coupled with less international and national news unless there is a local news angle.

Better access to the paper: Who do you call? Several focus group participants and interviewees had either written letters to the editor or complained/complimented the editorial management regarding coverage issues, others did not easily know who to call with complaints, or perhaps, more importantly, with news leads. For example a group of Scotts Valley readers were not aware that one reporter was assigned to their community.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Overview of Findings

The primary goal of this study was to identify why the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* suffered from lackluster acceptance by the Santa Cruz County community. Secondly this study sought to determine the strong and weak points of the *Sentinel* in meeting the expectations of local newspaper readers, in hopes of providing some guidance to the *Sentinel's* management in future planning.

The observations and comments of readers were often contradictory. Although the *Sentinel* clearly needs improvement in both its content and in its presentation of news, even its harshest critics can't think of a medium that delivers the unique local news in a better way than the *Sentinel*. Although the results of this qualitative study cannot be generalized to *Sentinel* readers as a whole, four general conclusions emerged from the study:

1. The *Sentinel* needs more and better business/economic reporting.
2. The *Sentinel's* writers need to do a better job of general reporting by including a variety of sources and viewpoints in their news stories.
3. The *Sentinel* is overpriced at the newsstand.
4. The *Sentinel* needs to be more reader-friendly in terms of interaction with its readers and accessibility to the readers.

Despite these identified shortcomings, the *Sentinel* clearly does meet the news and information needs for a stable core readership. For example, when one applies Wright's (1986) four functions of mass communication to the *Sentinel*, it can be seen that the functions are being met. In some cases, though, these functions are met better by competing media, or they are being met in only a barely acceptable level by the *Sentinel*.

By not delivering these vital informational functions on a consistent and quality basis, though, the *Sentinel* has damaged its credibility with at least some segments of its target community.

The competition. People have many ways of getting international, national, and even state news in Santa Cruz County. However a general consensus from the *Sentinel's* managers and others within the *Sentinel* organization is that the newspaper feels competition not only from many different media outlets, but also feels competition for the time of people who are living and experiencing life in a very beautiful part of the world. These specific media competitors and time constraints are cited in the same breath as a description of fewer and fewer people with a newspaper reading habit. Specific media competition centering on the *Good Times* and the *San Jose Mercury News* tends to become apologetic for the *Sentinel*. After all, if the readership of the *Sentinel* is flat, while other newspapers are becoming the preferred choices for local readers, then this contradicts the perceived sentiment that people don't read as much anymore.

Unlike newspapers of 30 or 40 years ago, the *Sentinel* is not locked in heated head-to-head competition with a cross-town rival. The nature of media competition has changed dramatically in the last decade as electronic media, especially cable, and more recently the internet have served to fill information needs. On a more direct level, the rise of the free-distribution weeklies, specifically *Good Times* and *Metro*, and the expansion of large regional newspapers like the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Jose Mercury News* have served to squeeze the *Sentinel*. Yet some of the *Sentinel's* competitive problems are not particularly strange, given Rosse's umbrella model of competition, and the realities of present-day newspaper publishing. Newspapers from coast to coast are trying a variety of marketing techniques to help firmly establish themselves as vital information sources in their communities.

The issues of community attachment and involvement as summarized by Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, & Ryu (1996), are unique in the Santa Cruz County area. Even as the *Sentinel* works to be the local source and present itself as such, some in the county have abandoned the city of the *Sentinel's* namesake. These former readers do not wish to be associated with the changed or changing Santa Cruz community. Some of these former readers have physically moved out of the city of Santa Cruz in a dramatic statement of disassociation. Still others, Santa Clara County commuters, south county residents, and politically disenfranchised conservatives, deny the *Sentinel* loyal readership because they feel ambivalent about the county, or, more precisely, the perception that the *Sentinel* creates about the county.

The observations of Stamm and Weiss (1986), regarding the qualities associated with people who are more likely to read a community's newspaper, certainly applies in Santa Cruz County to *Sentinel* supporters. These people who are settled in the area, active in the community, and are proud of the community, just want the *Sentinel* to the best it can. It appears that these people want to be able to say "my local newspaper is the greatest, just like the area in which I live."

The people interviewed for this thesis tend to break down into 3 specific categories:

1. Very longtime residents who have lived in the county for at least 20 years, and have deep roots in Santa Cruz County. Comments from this group were some of the most pointed. This group had seen the *Sentinel* go from local McPherson ownership to corporately-controlled Ottaway ownership. To a large extent, these residents were comfortable with the old conservative, provincial *Sentinel*. The content didn't "rock the boat" as one reader phrased it, and the conservative tone of the editorial page was like a Linus blanket for residents who weren't comfortable with the changes occurring within their county, especially the establishment of the university. At best, this group tolerates

today's *Sentinel*. They are the group that Editor Tom Honig described as "read it, use it, bitch about it."

2. Long-time community residents who have lived in the county for at least 15 years. This group either accepted the *Sentinel* for what it is—a small-town daily competing against two powerful regional dailies, or they have abandoned the *Sentinel* for other media. Although the reasons for this abandonment are varied, some clearly feel that the *Sentinel* does accurately reflect the community. To this group the *Sentinel* is either, still too conservative or it is too liberal, but in any case it needs to improve its local reporting.

The accepting group of these residents, however, appears almost apologetic or defensive about the *Sentinel*. These residents may be occasional readers, but this is because of the macro issues of time or cost, and not nearly so closely tied to criticism of the content.

3. New arrivals and the young. This group consists of university students and other transplants who have lived in the county for less than five years. Raised on television, and used to getting only the specific news they want, they seem to find the *Sentinel*'s presentation—and that of all traditional newspapers constraining. They are big users of *Good Times*, but will occasionally buy a *Sentinel* if the front page is intriguing and they have two quarters. This group does not compare today's *Sentinel* against the pre-Ottaway *Sentinel*, but perhaps even worse, this group compares the *Sentinel* against their former hometown papers—ranging from the *New York Times* to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Other newspapers have overcome negative feelings in their communities or strengthened their positions by paying close attention to the information needs of the core audience of proud community residents, while at the same time heavily promoting the strengths of their publications. Some newspapers, for example, *The Sacramento Bee*,

have overcome charges of bias by entering and winning a variety of journalism competitions, ranging from local contests to the Pulitzer Prize. These competitions, judged by third parties, allow people in the community to gain a new appreciation of how good their local newspaper is in comparison with others. Still other newspapers, for example, the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, have eliminated signed editorials and opened up their editorial and op ed pages entirely as a community forum. Both of these techniques could be employed at the *Sentinel* to deal with specific, and deep-rooted negative community perceptions.

The single, and some might say obvious solution to the *Sentinel's* stagnant circulation and community acceptance problem, however, lies with requiring its reporters to provide comprehensive and aggressive reporting of the county every day. No one is ready to write the obituary for the *Sentinel*, just yet. And although it is true that good quality scrappy, daily newspapers in such cities as Dallas, Houston, and Los Angeles have failed in the last 15 years, the *Sentinel's* unique market position and size make it a perfect candidate for a rebirth as not only the local source for news, but, more importantly, the local quality source for news in Santa Cruz County.

Many people, both in the community and within the walls of the *Sentinel*, hold a firm belief that there will always be a need for local news, and for reporting that is so parochial that only the *Sentinel* will continue to publish it. The challenge then for the *Sentinel* is to ensure that its content matches its marketing description--'Clearly the local source.'

Limitations of the study. Limitations that affected this research were access to time and human resources necessary to effectively recruit more distinct focus group subjects in the community. And because the study was voluntary, and some subjects in the newsroom viewed the researcher warily--perhaps as a pawn or spy of management, some were less than willing to sit down and speak to the researcher.

Finally, the researcher's location in Roseville, CA, did hamper the amount of time that could be spent at the newspaper and engaged locally in recruiting focus group subjects.

Contributions to the literature. This research is one of the first to examine a smaller daily in the 1990s using the methods of investigation pioneered by Ruth Clark in the 1970s and 1980s. Clark's studies were aimed at major metropolitan dailies in a different time period. The newspaper market and the expectations of newspaper readers have changed dramatically during the past 20 years. Based on this study, it would appear that newspaper readers in a smaller market tend to accept their local newspaper's failings, hope that it can improve, but when it doesn't, they abandon it. The *Sentinel* still carries some baggage from the days of the McPherson ownership, and this reputation is difficult to erase in the minds of long-time Santa Cruz residents. Therefore, a transient student population and an aging general population, actually bode well for the future of the *Sentinel* as it attempts to improve its reputation and credibility in the community. To a lesser degree, this study was useful in applying Rosse's umbrella theory of competition to a mid-sized daily and Stamm's community attachment theories to the changing and media-rich environment of 1995.

Directions for further research. The main reason more study is needed on this newspaper is because it is located in a literate, growing community, and the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel's* management, both locally and at Ottaway newspapers, is committed to delivering the best possible newspaper to the Santa Cruz County community. The research undertaken for this study has only scratched the surface on what it will take to revitalize the *Sentinel* in this community.

Several suggestions that were a result of this study are being implemented at the *Sentinel*. To ensure that the *Sentinel* is progressing in the proper direction, follow-up focus meetings should be undertaken, ideally with the same subjects.

Moreover, a stratified random sample of Santa Cruz County residents should be polled, keying on the major themes that emerged from this qualitative study, the areas concerning business coverage, bias, credibility, and perhaps dispelling long-standing myths about the newspaper and its choice of coverage.

REFERENCES

- American Society of Newspaper Editors (1995). *Beyond survival: Keys to forging ties with potential readers*. Reston, VA: Author.
- Bagdikian, Ben (1972). *The effete conspiracy and other crimes by the press*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bagdikian, Ben (1992). *The media monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Beam, Randal A. (1996). How perceived environmental uncertainty influences the marketing orientation of U.S. daily newspapers. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 73(2), 285-303.
- Beam, Randal A. (1993). The impact of group ownership variables on organizational professionalism at daily newspapers. *Journalism Quarterly*, 70(4), 907-18.
- Blankenburg, William (1993). The effects of public ownership on the financial performance of newspaper corporations. *Journalism Quarterly*, 70(1), 68-75.
- Bogart, Leo (1993). Newspapers of the future: Our look at the next century. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 14(2), 2-10.
- Bogart, Leo (1991). *Preserving the press: How daily newspapers mobilized to keep their readers*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bogart, Leo (1989). *Press and Public*. Lawrence Erlbaum: Hillsdale, NJ.
- Bogart, Leo & Orenstein, Frank (1965). Mass media and community identity in an interurban setting. *Journalism Quarterly*, 42(3), 179-188.
- Boorstin, Daniel (1974). *Democracy and its discontents: Reflections on everyday America*. New York: Random House.
- Boorstin, Daniel (1987). *The Image: A guide to pseudo-events in America*. New York: Athenaeum.
- California Newspaper Publishers Association (1979). *California Newspaper Directory* (1979). Sacramento, CA: Author.
- Carnot, Karen (1995, June 28). [Advertising Director, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, Santa Cruz, CA]. Personal interview.

Clark, Ruth (1980). *Changing needs of changing readers*. Reston, VA: American Newspaper Publishers Association.

Cose, Ellis (1989). *The press*. New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc.

Coulson, David C. (1994). Impact of ownership on newspaper quality. *Journalism Quarterly*, 71(2), 403-410.

Devey, Steven (1989). Umbrella competition for newspaper circulation in the Boston metro area. *Journal of Media Economics*, 21(2), 31-40.

Dizard, Wilson P. (1994). *Old media/new media: Mass communications in the information age*. New York: Longman.

Donohue, George A.; Olien, Clarice N.; and Tichenor, Phillip J. (1988). Relationship between corporate ownership and editor attitudes about business. *Journalism Quarterly*, 65(2), 259-266.

Edelstein, Alex & Larsen, Otto (1960). The weekly press' contribution to a sense of urban community. *Journalism Quarterly*, 37(2), 489-498.

Editor & Publisher (1988). *Editor & Publisher Yearbook 1988*. New York: Author.

Editor & Publisher (1993). *Editor & Publisher Yearbook 1996*. New York: Author.

Entman, Robert (1985). Newspaper competition and First Amendment ideals: Does monopoly matter? *Journal of Communication*, 35(3), 150.

Fico, Frederick & Lacy, Stephen. (1990). Newspaper quality & ownership: Rating the groups. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 11(1), 42-56.

Fortini-Campbell, Lisa & Stamm, Keith (1983). The relationship of community ties to newspaper subscribing and use. *Journalism Monographs*, No. 84.

Foust, Dean (1993, July 12). What's black and white and blue and yellow -- And less in the red? *Business Week*, p. 30.

Franklin, Denise (1995, July 2). [Staff writer, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, Santa Cruz, CA]. Personal interview.

Gladney, Albert George (1993). USA Today, its imitators, and its critics: Do newsroom staffs face an ethical dilemma? *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 8(1), 17-36.

Hawley, Melinda D. (1993, January). How local dailies lose their readers. *Presstime*, pp. 1, 45.

Honig, Tom (1995, June 29). [Editor, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, Santa Cruz, CA]. Personal interview.

Hojnacki, Stanley W. (1995, June 28). [Managing Editor, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, Santa Cruz, CA]. Personal interview.

Janowitz, Morris (1952). *The community press in an urban setting*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Jeffres, Leo W., & Dobos, Jean (1984). Communication and neighborhood mobilization. *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, 20(9), 97-112.

Kasarda, John & Janowitz, Morris (1974). Community attachment in mass society. *American Sociological Review*, 39, 328-339.

King, Charles A. (1986). *Ottaway Newspapers the first 50 years*. Campbell Hall, NY: Ottaway Newspapers Inc.

Kotler, Phillip (1991). *Marketing management: Analysis, planning, implementation and control* (7th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Laakaniemi, Ray (1987). Written by pros, read by amateurs: Analysis of trade speeches on improving newspaper content. *Newspaper Research Journal*. 7(3), 31-40.

Lacy, Stephen (1984). Competition among metropolitan daily, small daily, and weekly newspapers. *Journalism Quarterly*, 61(2), 640-644.

Lacy, Stephen; Sohn, Ardyth; & Stephens, Lowndes (1988). A content analysis of metropolitan and suburban newspapers in Denver and Detroit. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 39(2), 39-50.

Lacy, Stephen; Sohn, Ardyth; & Wicks, Lan LeBanc (1993). *Media management: A casebook approach*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Lasswell, Harold (1948). The structure and function of communication in society. In Lyman Bryson (Ed.), *The communication of ideas* (3rd ed.). (Chap. 1). New York: Harper & Row.

Lovejoy, Bill (1995, June 29). [Photo editor, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, Santa Cruz, CA]. Personal interview.

Lowe, Larry S. & deTarnowsky, George (1993, December 10). Newspaper research: A growing consultant opportunity. *Journal of Professional Marketing Services*, 54, pp: 45-54.

Market Opinion Research (1995). *Market Opinion Research Summary 1995*. Santa Cruz, CA: *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*.

Matthews, Martha N. (1996). How public ownership affects publisher autonomy. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 73(2), 342-353.

McManus, John H. (1994). *Market-driven journalism: Let the citizen beware*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Meyers, Philip (1985). *The newspaper survival book: An editor's guide to marketing research*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Meyers, Philip, & Wearden, Stanley. (1984). The effects of public ownership on newspaper companies: A Preliminary Inquiry. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 48, 566-577.

Miller, Donald (1995, June 28). [City Editor, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, Santa Cruz, CA]. Personal interview.

Morton, John (1984, September). Newspapers are losing their grip. *Washington Journalism Review*. p. 52.

Myers, James (1990, October 8). Knight-Ridder aims younger. *Advertising Age*, p. 38.

Neuman, Lawrence (1994). *Social Research Methods*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Park, Robert (1929). Urbanization as measured by newspaper circulation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 34, 60-79.

Rarick, Galen (1973). Differences between daily newspaper subscribers and non-subscribers. *Journalism Quarterly*. 50(2), 265-270.

Regan, David B. (1995, June 29). [Publisher, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, Santa Cruz, CA]. Personal interview.

Robinson, John (1994, July 2). Former *Sentinel* publisher Fred McPherson Jr. dies. *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, pp. A1, A12.

- Rosse, James (1980). The decline of direct newspaper competition. *Journal of Communication*, 30(1), 65-71.
- Rothenbuhler, Eric W. (1991). The process of community involvement. *Communication Monographs*, 58(3), 63-78.
- Rothenbuhler, Eric W.; Mullen, Lawrence J.; DeLaurell, Richard; & Ryu, Choon Ryul. (1996) Communication, community attachment, and involvement. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 73(2), 445-466.
- Rowland, Leon (1944). *Santa Cruz Sentinel-News: Eighty-nine years old; A brief history of newspapers of Santa Cruz County*. Santa Cruz, CA: Santa Cruz Sentinel-News.
- Soloski, John (1979). Economics and management: The real influence of newspaper groups. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 1(11), 19-28.
- Schweitzer, John C. (1992). Marketing research in the Newspaper Business. In Stephen Lacy, Ardyth Sohn, & Robert Giles (Eds.), *Readings in Media Management* (pp.153-80). Columbia, SC: Media Management and Economics Division of AEJMC.
- Shamdasani, Prem., & Stewart, David. (1990). *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Shepard, Alicia C. (1996, January/February). Man bites dog (II): Editor knocks focus groups. *American Journalism Review*, p. 13.
- Shoemaker, Pamela J., & Reese, Stephen D. (1991). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Smith, Anthony (1980). *Goodbye Gutenberg: The Newspaper Revolution of the 1980s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stamm, Keith (1985). *Newspaper use and community ties: Toward a dynamic theory*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.
- Stamm, Keith, & Underwood, Doug (1992). Balancing business with journalism: Newsroom policies at 12 West Coast newspapers. *Journalism Quarterly*, 69(2), 301-317.
- Stamm, Keith, & Weiss, Robert (1986). The newspaper and community integration: A study of ties to a local church community. *Communication Research*, 13(1), 125-137.
- Stone, Gerald (1977). Community commitment: Predictive theory of daily newspaper circulation. *Journalism Quarterly*, 54(2), 509-514.

Tillinghast, Diana (1988). Limits of competition. In Stephen Lacy, Maxwell McCombs, Robert Picard, & James Winter (Eds.), *Press concentration and monopoly* (pp. 71-87). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Underwood, Doug (1993). *When MBAs rule the newsroom*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Urban, Christine (1985). The competitive advantage of new publishing formats. In Marvin Greenberger (Ed.), *Electronic Publishing Plus* (pp. 41-56). White Plains, NY: Knowledge Industries Publications.

Wright, Charles (1986). *Mass communication: A sociological perspective* (3rd ed.). New York: Random House.

Yin, Robert K. (1994). *Case Study Research Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.



A campus of The California State University

Office of the Academic Vice President • Associate Academic Vice President • Graduate Studies and Research
One Washington Square • San Jose, California 95192-0025 • 408-924-2480

TO: Gary Giacomo
2413 Uphum Court
Carmichael, CA 95608

FROM: Serena W. Stanford *Serena W. Stanford*
AAVP, Graduate Studies & Research

DATE: April 24, 1995

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"The Santa Cruz Sentinel and its Readers"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Dr. Serena Stanford immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that each subject needs to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal, will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.

APPENDIX 1

Santa Cruz *County*
Sentinel

207 Church Street, P.O. Box 638
Santa Cruz, California 95061 / 408-423-4242
Fax No. 408-423-1154

Gary Giacomo
2413 Upham Court
Carmichael, CA 95608

Nov. 22, 1994

Dear Gary:

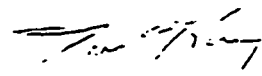
This letter is to confirm the details of your proposed case study on the readership of the Santa Cruz County Sentinel that you outlined during our meeting on Nov. 2.

The Sentinel is excited about this project and will cooperate with you and provide you with the necessary access to personnel to ensure a thorough study that will be useful to us all.

As we discussed, the Sentinel will provide meeting places for the focus group sessions at our office, a desk and phone for your occasional use for arranging the focus group meetings, postage for the confirmation letters to focus group participants, premiums and refreshments for the participants, staffers to conduct pre-focus session readership/recall interviews with focus group participants and expenses related to videotaping the sessions (should we decide to do so.)

Again, we look forward to completion of this study, and trust that the results will be illuminating and informative, both for your scholarly purposes and for the improvement of the Santa Cruz County Sentinel.

Sincerely,



Tom Honig
Editor

APPENDIX 2



A campus of The California State University

School of Journalism and Mass Communications
One Washington Square • San Jose, California 95192-0055 • 408/924-3240 • Fax 408/924-3229

April 22, 1995

Dear *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* reader:

We need your help.

We would like to invite you to participate in a focus group study on the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*. It is part of our ongoing research on the future of newspapers.

Your household is one of 300 area households that was selected at random to participate in a focus group meeting. We are seeking a diverse group of men and women of different ages for these focus group meetings. Meetings will be scheduled on Saturdays and will take about 90 minutes.

In a relaxed and informal group setting at the *Sentinel's* offices, you will be asked to voice your opinions -- both positive and negative -- on the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*. The results of this study should increase our understanding of the newspaper's relationship with its readers. There has been little research conducted in this area, so your participation is important.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Choosing not to participate in this study will not affect your relations with San Jose State University. We guarantee that your opinions and statements will be completely anonymous; they will be used only in combination with others in the group.

There is a unique and intimate bond between newspapers, the communities they serve, and their readers. However, newspaper readers have very little chance to be heard in our impersonal society. It is only through such things as focus group meetings that individuals are able to voice their opinions. We would appreciate your help and cooperation because your opinions are very important to the success of our research.

If you would like to be considered for participation in one of the focus group meetings, or if you would like more information before deciding to participate, please leave a voicemail message for Gary Giacomo at (408) 427-6919, or you may call me at home (916) 482-9826.

☺ We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gary Giacomo
M.S. student in
Mass Communications

Prof. Diana Stover
Graduate Program Coordinator
School of Journalism and Mass Communications



A campus of The California State University

School of Journalism and Mass Communications
One Washington Square • San Jose, California 95192-0055 • 408/924-3240 • Fax 408/924-3229

April 14, 1995

Dear former *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* reader:

We need your help.

We would like to have you participate in a countywide focus group study on the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*. It is part of our ongoing research on the future newspapers.

Your household is one of 150 former *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* reader households that was selected at random to participate in a focus group meeting. We are seeking a diverse mixture of Santa Cruz County men and women of different ages, both current readers and former readers for these focus group meetings. Meetings will be scheduled on Saturdays and will take approximately 90 minutes. In a relaxed and informal group setting at the *Sentinel's* offices, you will be asked to voice your opinions -- both positive and negative -- on the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*. The results of this study should increase our understanding of the newspaper's relationship with members of the community. There has been little research conducted in this area, so your participation is important.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Choosing not to participate in this study will not affect your relations with San Jose State University. We guarantee that your opinions and statements will be completely anonymous; they will be used only in combination with others in the group.

Normally, there is a unique and intimate bond between a newspaper, the community it serves, and the people that live and work in the community. However, for nonreaders this bond has been broken and we are interested in knowing why. We would appreciate your help and cooperation because your opinions are very important to the success of our research.

If you would like to be considered for participation in one of the focus group meetings, or if you would like more information before deciding to participate, please leave a voice mail message for Gary Giacomo at (408) 427-6919 or you may call me at home (916) 482-9826.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gary Giacomo
M.S. student in Mass Communications

Prof. Diana Stover
Graduate Program Coordinator
School of Journalism and Mass Communications

APPENDIX 3

Santa Cruz County Sentinel Readers' Survey

How often do you read the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sundays only | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 days a week | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 days a week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 day a week | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 days a week | <input type="checkbox"/> Daily |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 days a week | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 days a week | |

What other newspaper(s) do you read?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> San Jose Mercury News | <input type="checkbox"/> Watsonville Pajaronian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> San Francisco Chronicle | <input type="checkbox"/> Salinas Californian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good Times | <input type="checkbox"/> USA Today |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Metro (Santa Cruz or other) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scotts Valley Banner | <input type="checkbox"/> None |

Do you subscribe to the *Sentinel*?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how long have you subscribed? _____

Readability:

Do you like the way the *Sentinel* looks?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Why or why not? _____

Do you know where to look when you want to find something in the *Sentinel*?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are certain items easy to find or do you find yourself having to hunt for them? (please circle one)

Easy to Find Have to Hunt

Do you think the type in the stories is easy to read?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you think the headlines are easy to read?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you think that overall, the *Sentinel* is easy to read?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Why or why not? _____

Are the stories too long, too short, or the right size? (please circle one)

Too Long Too Short Okay

Is the type in the stories too big, too small, or the right size to read easily? (please circle one)

Too Big Too Small Okay

Likes and Dislikes:

What part of the *Sentinel* do you read first? Rank in the order in which you read them:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> World News | <input type="checkbox"/> Weather | <input type="checkbox"/> Obituaries | <input type="checkbox"/> Advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local News | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic | <input type="checkbox"/> Horoscopes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County News | <input type="checkbox"/> Editorials | <input type="checkbox"/> TV Listings | <input type="checkbox"/> Classifieds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State News | <input type="checkbox"/> Letters to Ed. | <input type="checkbox"/> Stocks | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business | <input type="checkbox"/> Spotlight/Ent. | <input type="checkbox"/> Comics | _____ |

What information or section in the *Sentinel* do you find the most useful? _____

What's your favorite section of the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*? _____

Is there anything (a feature, section, issue, etc.) you'd like to see in the *Sentinel* that's not there now? _____

Content

How much of an issue of the *Sentinel* do you usually read?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than half of the newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> More than half of the paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Half of the newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> The whole newspaper |

Roughly how much time do you spend reading an issue of the *Sentinel*?

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15 minutes or less | <input type="checkbox"/> 30-45 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> 45-60 minutes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15-30 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> About 30 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> More than an hour |

Is the *Sentinel* your main source of news? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do the stories you see in the *Sentinel* accurately reflect the community as you know it? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Does the paper reflect your views? ☐ Yes, usually ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not usually

Do you think the *Sentinel* is biased? ☐ Yes, usually ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not usually

Your Community:

Do you think the people who work for the *Sentinel* understand your community? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you ever met anyone who works at the *Sentinel*? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Can you name any of the columnists in the *Sentinel*? _____

Who is your favorite *Sentinel* columnist? _____

General:

What three words would you use to describe the *Sentinel*?

What's the most memorable story you've seen in the *Sentinel* in the past month?

In general, what do you like and/or dislike about the *Sentinel*? _____

What would you change if you could? _____

Biographical Info:

Age: _____ Sex: (circle) M / F City: _____ Profession: _____

Do you consider yourself: ☐ Very liberal ☐ Liberal ☐ Moderate
 ☐ Conservative ☐ Very conservative

Thank you for taking part in our survey.

APPENDIX 4

Proposed script for focus group meetings

The goal of this script is to make the focus group participants feel comfortable speaking in the group and ensuring that useful data is uncovered from everyone in the group.

Each group will be a little different, and depending upon points raised by participants different tangents may be explored. What follows is a proposed script which covers many of the criticisms leveled at today's newspapers by media critics presented in a conversational open probe fashion that should be conducive to focus group participation. Main questions will be printed on 5-1/2 inch x 8 1/2 inch cards placed at each seat. The use of cards with main questions will serve to keep the discussion focused on the correct topics.

I. INTRODUCTION/WARMUP

My name is Gary Giacomo. I'm a graduate student at San Jose State University and I'm conducting this study as part of my master's program in Mass Communication. I'd like to thank all of you for accepting the invitation to participate in this study. This is going to be a very informal discussion about the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* in particular and newspapers in general -- what you like, what you don't like, what you'd like to change. We'd like everyone to participate and to feel at ease, so let's go around the room and each one of you tell us your name -- first names will do -- and something about yourself, what you do, your family the things that interest you.

II. ADDITIONAL INTRODUCTION

That's great. Now we'll go around the room again, and this time, I'd like to know the kinds of things you like to read -- books, magazines, newspapers and why, and what your favorite subjects are to read about.

III. NEWSPAPER HABIT

We were talking recently in a class at San Jose State about the newspaper reading habit, and the class was kind of divided. Some people said that they really enjoy reading a newspaper -- they look forward to the newspaper every day. Others said that they found it was hard work to read a paper. How do each of you feel? What are the kinds of things about a newspaper that make it enjoyable as far as you are concerned? What makes it hard work?

IV. CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT IT?

Last fall the two main daily newspapers in San Francisco didn't publish for a few weeks. We certainly hope that never happens here in Santa Cruz-- but just suppose the *Sentinel* was not being published -- what would you miss the most? In what ways would television or radio help to fill the gap? What would be the type of information that you'd need, but that you couldn't get from television or radio?

V. RELATIONSHIP WITH PAPER/INTERESTS

Some newspaper critics charge that editors have gotten too far away from their readers -- that they edit newspapers for themselves -- and not for their readers. How do you feel? What do you think the *Sentinel's* editors are thinking about most when they decide what to put or not to put in the newspaper? Some people have indicated that people are less interested in subjects like national and international news, government -- local and national, than they used to be. Is that true in Santa Cruz County? How do you feel? Please be honest -- are there parts of the *Sentinel* that you resent because the editors seem to pay so much attention to things that don't interest you?

VI. HAPPY OR ANGRY

On the whole, do you feel good toward and friendly about the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* -- or do you feel kind of angry and hostile? What are the kinds of things that make you feel good about the *Sentinel*. What gets you angry? Do you trust the *Sentinel*? What, if anything, makes you distrust the *Sentinel*?

VII. TIME AND MONEY

Two major reasons people give for not reading newspapers are lack of time and cost. Let's talk about cost. Compared to the price of other things, do you feel that the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* is a good buy for the money or not a good buy? Why?

About how much time do you spend on any one day reading the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*? Do you think that's a lot or a little time? When it comes right down to it -- do you think that time and money are the real reasons for people not reading the *Sentinel*? What do you think they are really saying when they use these excuses? What criticisms are they making of the newspaper?

VIII. SUNDAY NEWSPAPERS

Is reading the Sunday *Santa Cruz County Sentinel* part of your regular Sunday routine? Which special features in the Sunday paper are your favorites? Which are your least favorite? What would you like to see added to the *Sunday Sentinel*.

IX. OTHER NEWSPAPERS

If you didn't read the *Sentinel* which newspaper would you choose to read and why? Is there any newspaper habit? What changes/additions must the *Sentinel* make to attract the interest of these readers?

X. OTHER COMMENTS

Are there any other comments? Thank you once again for your participation and your candid comments.

APPENDIX 5

Question areas for interviews with *Sentinel* personnel.

Sentinel personnel were interviewed in formal scheduled and recorded question and answer sessions and also in impromptu “drop-in” sessions with the researcher. General questions centered on how long the employee has been in the newspaper business, their education and motivations for becoming involved with newspapers. More specific questions centered on mission statements for specific departments, competitive pressures and perceptions and what the future may hold for the *Sentinel*.